A SPLENDID NEW SERIAL HAS JUST STARTED.

SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON (OF PEARSON'S WEEKLY)

No. 394. FOR WEEK ENDING JULY 18TH, 1896. [ONE PENNY.

1896 PROCLAMATION.

Grand Pioneer Reduction Sale

By Messrs. F. HODGSON & SON, The Well-known Carpet Manufacturers of the City of Leeds, will take effect on sight of this advertisement.

OUR NEW VENTURE! Yes, Two Different Pattern Hearthrugs or Carpets for the Price of One! (Copyright).

Whereas, in launching forth our New Production, THE "PRUDENTIAL" CARPETS AND HEARTHRUGS, we beg to state they will have a Rich Turkish and Persian Design on one side, and on the reverse the blended and costly designs of Wilton make. The advantage thus gained is great, as they can be utilised in various rooms at one cost. This is a valuable step in economy.

PRODIGIOUS SALE OF THE

"PRUDENTIAL" Reversible CARPETS

(Registered.)

Reversible, with a different pattern on both sides, woven throughout with handsome border to correspond; richly blended in several colours to suit any furniture. Made in 10 sizes only. These carpets are the production of much care, labour, and forethought, and are made in handsome and elaborate patterns (which are protected by registration). They combine the rich blended colours of the Turkish and Persian with the elegant designs of the Wilton. These goods cannot be distinguished from real Brussels when laid down, and cannot be excelled in durability.

	Each.		Each.
6ft. by 9ft., Reduced Sale Price	4/9	9ft. by 15ft., Reduced Sale Price	12/6
7½ft. by 9ft. " " "	5/11	12ft. by 12ft. " " "	12/9
9ft. by 9ft. " " "	7/6	12ft. by 13½ft. " " "	14/6
9ft. by 10½ft. " " "	8/6	12ft. by 15ft. " " "	15/9
9ft. by 12ft. " " "	9/6	12ft. by 18ft. " " "	19/6
10½ft. by 12ft. " " "	11/6	12ft. by 21ft. " " "	22/6

When ordering please mention if for Bed, Dining, Drawing, or Sitting Room, and any particular colour preferred.

"Neal Lodge, Upper Norwood, S.E., January 18th., 1896.
The Dowr. Lady Abercromby is pleased with the 'Prudential' Carpet she ordered."

Blairquhan, Maybole, N.B., August 3rd.
Lady Hunter Blair writes: "Will Messrs. F. Hodgson & Son send her another 'Prudential' Carpet, same as before, crimson and gold, dimensions, 9ft. by 10½ft. Cheque inclosed."

A Reversible "Prudential" Hearthrug (Reg)., to match above Carpets, sent for 1s. 6d. extra, size 2 yards long, and 1 yard wide.

SPECIAL OFFER.—3 Hearthrugs for 4s. 3d.; or 6 for 8s.; or 12 for 15s. 6d.

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(Registered). **GUARANTEED GENUINE BARGAINS.**

Sale Price **2/11** EACH.

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Value unequalled in the Annals of Advertising. As a favour, kindly Examine and Compare these Carpets.

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On receipt of this Coupon and P.O.O. or Stamps for amount, we guarantee to send goods as above to your address in any part of the United Kingdom. Cash returned in full if not satisfied.

(Signed) F. HODGSON & SON.

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WOODSLEY ROAD, LEEDS.

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ABSOLUTELY the BEST VALUE in the WORLD.

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TWO GOLD MEDALS AWARDED.

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Perfection of Material, Cut, Style, and Finish Guaranteed.

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MODEL 458, as illustrated, is a charming mode in the John Noble Cheviot Serge, consisting of full wide Skirt and smart Bodice, prettily trimmed with fine military braid and finished fancy buttons. Saddle and sleeves lined. Price 10/6 complete. Carriage 9d. extra.

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Write for patterns, also "Illustrated Book of Costumes," containing numerous other Designs.

Please mention *SHORT STORIES* when writing.

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BILIOUS & NERVOUS DISORDERS,

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Weak Stomach, Impaired Digestion,

Disordered Liver & Female Ailments.

ANNUAL SALE SIX MILLION BOXES.

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COUPON.

No. 29

July 18, 1896.

S.S. S.S.

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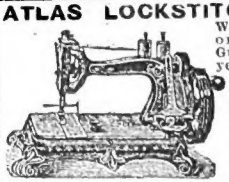

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SHORT STORIES

EDITED BY C. ARTHUR PEARSON.

No. 394.] For the Week ending July 18th, 1896. [ONE PENNY

In the Moment of Triumph.

ONE evening in June, in a large house in one of the fashionable streets of London, a big entertainment was going forward. It was a concert, and one of the most perfectly carried out in all its details that the London world had enjoyed that season.

The long, brightly-lighted and flower-decked drawing-room ended in a cool and shadowy conservatory in which two women were sitting on a sofa, under the palms, screened from the view of the multitude. The liquid notes of a beautiful voice floated across to them from the music-room beyond—rose, fell, and died into silence.

"Ah!" said the younger of the two, with a deep breath of longing—a young girl with the bloom of youth on her flushed and rounded cheek, and the sparkle of enthusiasm in her bright eyes—"to sing like that! To give pleasure such as she has given me! To stir the emotions of one's fellows. That is life!"

The elder woman, whose delicate, sensitive face betrayed more of a yearning pain than pleasure as she sat listening, turned curiously to look in the face beside her. "And you wish for 'life' as you call it, of that kind?"

"Wish?—that is a poor word to express what I feel. Even to know personally a few of the people in the world who have *done* something with their lives, people who write the books that move us! That would be best of all."

"I know some of them. In my wanderings to and fro I have come across more than one celebrity of the book world."

"Have you?" said the girl eagerly, "do tell me about some of them. I have always wondered," she went on, after a short pause, "what the feelings of an authoress would be in the moment of triumph—when, after much struggling, she has attained her first success—has awakened to find herself famous in fact, such as the author of 'The Dark Sea,'" alluding to a book by an, as yet, unknown writer which had lately taken the world by storm.

"What they feel at the moment that fame comes to them," echoed her companion with the worn face, dreamily.

A sudden light flashed into her eyes, and she said:

"I can tell you if you like."

"Oh, please do. How I envy you meeting the interesting people that you do!"

"Yes," was the answer, in a curiously constrained voice, "I am an enviable person, I suppose. I know the authoress you speak of particularly well, and will tell you how she attained success, if you care to listen."

The conservatory led into a square walled-in garden beyond, and the doors dividing the one from the other were wide open to the warm June night. Outside sat two men smoking cigarettes, and carrying on a desultory conversation. As the elder woman began to speak, one of them stopped short in the middle of a sentence and remained silent until her voice ceased also.

"She is over thirty now," she was saying, "an age when success, if it comes and she is a lonely woman, makes her feel lonelier than it found her. Almost from a child she had had it in her to write, and, long before

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she had conceived any definite idea of writing a book. she had made a habit of putting down on scraps of paper, describing as well as she could anything which made her feel—a beautiful view, a sunset, a child's face —any strong emotion she experienced

"After some years of a more or less happy girlhood she met a man, younger than herself, who, in his boyish, urgent fashion made love to her and—well, none of that is to the point, or will interest you. Nothing came of it except—except that it broke her heart." Her lip quivered, and the unshed tears brimmed her eyes. Someone was singing in the room beyond,

Douglas, Douglas, tender and true,

that old song which has a power to reach our heart always; and, set to Lady John Scott's exquisite music, "does bring the tears unbidden to our eyes."

She went on: "Troubles followed thick and fast after this, and to cut the story short, she at last found herself in London, living on a pittance—her portion from the wreck of her father's fortune—and with her face set steadily towards making a name for herself in literature; uphill work as all know who have tried it. From the smart house, the many servants, the clothes, the enjoyments of the life that had been hers, she passed by short transitions, after eating for a time the bitter bread of charity, to the one-garret life that is the fate of so many breadwinners. She was not thirty then, and the hopes of youth, and the longings of youth, were not quite dead within her; they still made themselves felt from time to time in spasmodic jerks and tremblings—on lovely spring days when she allowed herself a rest from her labours to stroll through the lilac-scented paths of the Park, too exhausted from semi-starvation and over-work to think very deeply of anything connected with the future that lay so dark in front of her. Rather she let her thoughts wander back into the past—her steps straying over the burnt-up grass, to the glinting Serpentine beyond—to the long-ago evenings when she and her brother had so often drifted lazily down the river in the sunset glow.

"But she did not completely give up society in those days of dreary monotony, nor clothe herself in the hopeless eccentricities so much affected by all grades of artists and writers. She did what she could to keep up her friends, often going without food to buy herself a decent pair of gloves, or a new hat."

"Do you really mean," interposed the girl, with wide eyes and lowered voice, "that—that she really was hungry?" In her sheltered life it seemed so strange and so monstrous a thing that another girl, a lady like herself, should want actual food.

"Yes,"—and the woman's eyes shone—"she used to try to live upon a shilling a day, and you don't know how difficult that is to a girl brought up daintily as you or I have been—till you have tried it! She could not eat what those in a lower class would have fattened on—coarsely cooked, unappetising food. Her one room was very small, and dark—hot in summer, freezing in winter, when she sat in all the warm things she possessed, to save a fire, and wrote and mended. And most nights she felt very empty and hungry and solitary when she went to bed."

"How terrible!" said the girl gently.

"But it was not like that all the year. Sometimes in the autumn she paid visits in the country, and there she met people who interested her and kept her life from stagnating. She had a certain charm of her own which men felt; and in her, as in every other woman that ever was born, the craving for sympathy and protection and the strength that the love of a man gives to a woman was strong in her—apart, if you know what I mean, from the longing for the particular love of any one individual. It was the natural instinct every woman feels to lean on someone stronger than herself. All this she put aside, in the instances where it might have developed itself into the thing she craved, until her purpose should be accomplished.

"Once it went very hard with her and she almost succumbed to the temptation, for as such she viewed it, having vowed a vow unto herself.

"He was a very different man from the other; he was tender, chivalrous, gentle with women as towards something to be shielded, protected, cared for; and his wonderfully keen perceptions enabled him to see further into her complex nature than anyone had ever taken the trouble to see before. I know, because he has since told me so much about those days; he often says that the first moment he looked in her face he loved it for the tale of repressed suffering he read in it."

"And she?" asked the girl quickly.

The man who was listening so intently in the dark garden, where the few stars twinkled down through the whispering leaves of the big lime, threw away his cigar and turned his head towards the open door where the cool tinkle of the miniature fountain broke the waiting silence, and waited for the answer.

"I have said," replied the woman, "that she had a purpose, and, wisely or foolishly, perhaps she herself did not know, would think of none of these things till her purpose was accomplished. All that was best within her rose up and responded yearningly to the unspoken feeling he had for her. But, long ago, she also had gauged the depths of an even more complicated character than her own, and in the midst of her misery had seen, clear and certain, the one dominant fact that that which would have power to move him, and that alone, would be the accomplishment of something that the world would applaud to the echo, and which, further, would place her beyond his reach.

"She was always conscious of a strong instinct which told her he and she would meet again—that in some way her book would bring them together and also that then, and not till then, would the last scene of the play be played out, and who knows," she went on dreamily, "what that scene will be?

"Do you think," she continued after a pause, "that every time she looked in the glass and traced the new faint lines that privation, cold, suffering and anxiety were drawing round her eyes and mouth, and saw still another grey hair added to the number that already streaked the dark, that it did not further her determination to succeed in the task she had set herself?" There was a bitter ring in the woman's voice as she proceeded. "She had not striven so hard and so long to give in for the first strong temptation that assailed her.

"After this episode she went back to London and her garret, and all through the long cold winter, when food was scarce and fuel scarcer" ("Good God!" murmured the man in the garden, under his breath, his deep set eyes gleaming like the stars above, under the broad band of his dark eyebrows) "worked on at her book, which was her life, and was written, to use a true, if, perhaps, highflown metaphor, with her heart's blood. It had not been without a struggle that she had elected to make 'copy' of her most sacred feelings, her bitterest agony; but she guessed rightly in her inexperience, that it is truth alone which makes the only real success in the

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literary world, though ephemeral shams may endure for a night.

"With what a sinking of the heart she saw, time after time, the return of the 'rejected manuscripts' of some of her small magazine ventures you may imagine when you reflect on the loneliness of her life at that time.

"She almost persuaded herself of the fallacy of this truth which she had deemed so all-important a factor of success, for these small attempts were also written from her heart, things she had known and seen around her in the life she had done with and yet the editors would have none of them. 'Too fantastic,' 'unreal,' were some of the criticisms bestowed upon them by the kinder members of the brotherhood, those who had at least given them a reading.

"At last one wrote: 'There is so much that is good in your articles and yet they are not altogether what will "take." I would advise you to try your hand at something that shall be simpler, less full of the workings of manifold and complex emotions in your characters, fuller of the common surface—details of the ordinary story-teller.'

"The evening that she received this was thundery, and the heat of her small room intolerable. All through the long hot night she sat at her little table writing; her feet like stones, her head burning; and as the red sun stole up the summer sky the last word was written of the commonplace article that was to begin the work of her initiation into the world of print."

"Oh, I am glad!" broke in the girl, "I am glad she succeeded in the end. But, tell me, what became of the man, the first one—did he marry?"

"He married," answered the woman, in a toneless voice, and her eyes wandered into the dark of the garden.

"And did she ever see him again—has she seen him since she became famous?"

"To the best of my knowledge she has never seen him since," replied the woman again mechanically.

"But to go back to our original starting-point, what are her feelings after so much trouble and so much hard work, on becoming famous?"

"It is not many days since she said she felt only a strange and indefinite sense of waiting—waiting——"

The last long-drawn-out notes from under Wolff's wonderful magical fingers in the far room are sobbing through the vibrating silence. The distant hum of London echoes faintly as from a long way off. A dark shadow fills the open doorway. The woman starts, and a sudden horror as of a deadly fear, dilates in her grey eyes as they meet the sombre fire in the man's. He comes quickly forward and drops into a seat beside her. His companion saunters on into the drawing-room, and the girl looks from one to the other and keeps silence.

The slow flush that travels painfully over the woman's worn sweet face, fades and leaves her pale.

"I hope you will forgive an old friend's unconscious eavesdropping," he begins lightly, but with evident effort in the constrained tones as he proceeds. "You tell a story well, and I grew so interested that I quite forgot that such an unpleasant word might be applied to me, therefore I came in to make myself known. Please go on. She was waiting—waiting, for what?" The fire in his eyes deepens, his voice has a ring of command, but the ghost of a smile hovering over his finely-cut lips makes the dark face a very beautiful one.

Her eyes do not move from his, and the life of all her face is concentrated in them; he can see, as the hanging lantern above their heads casts its dimly religious light on her white cheeks.

"I said it was some days ago that she felt like that. You must remember fame is short-lived, and all its stages ephemeral. I believe she no longer has that strange feeling. It has reached the stage beyond—the last scene."

"Yes? you interest me. What do you suppose would occur if, when they meet again, she should learn that the wife he married almost in his boyhood, as you said, had left him soon afterwards for a better world, to mourn her loss in the pitiless light of a disillusion which the short experience of married life had furnished?"

The girl, sitting there beside the two, apparently forgotten by both, noted the faint flicker of the heavy eyelids over the steady grey eyes, as the man's voice ceased—no heightened colour came again to mark another high-tide of emotion.

"She would pity the man, I believe."

"Pity him—pity him—*only?*" In the low tones there lay a passion that seemed altogether superfluous to the quiet tenor of the conversation.

"Men make mistakes," he went on. "Do you mean that the woman who could write 'The Dark Sea,' and feel all that she had written, would yet have nothing more than *pity*, after all those long years of her lonely faithfulness, to give the man who had caused her all that sorrow;" (she shivered; he had struck, with, maybe, unconscious cleverness or intuition, a sensitive chord in woman's nature, and one which seldom ceases to vibrate in every true woman's heart) "the man who *knew* that once he had made a *great mistake*."

The stars were paling, the dawn was rushing gloriously up the palpitating sky. Its rays fell full on the tired face, almost haggard now in the pure and lovely new day, as the man's senses were quick to note, and yet—a great hunger grew in his strange eyes, a strong agony crept into his dark face. Her hands lay still in her lap, but the fingers were strained over one another. She neither raised her voice nor altered its tone as she answered slowly: "There are, in heaven and in earth, mistakes which never can be rectified—mistakes which have gone too deep for tears or—for restitution. Come," she added, suddenly to the girl at her side, "your beauty sleep as well as your chaperon will be waiting for you, and I am sure you must be tired of my long story; but I can tell you the end before we go in to the others if you like," standing up with her face to the radiant dawn—her pale sad face in which, also, a new day had dawned, so that the old day could never reign again. "The moment of that woman's triumph arrived—the moment for which she had starved, and striven early and late; the moment that had eaten up her youth in its advent—it came in actual detail as she had always known it would, and, coming, found her—desolate. Come." And they moved together into the lighted room, leaving the man alone, looking up at the day which had dawned for him also.

VERNER FENTON.

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ARABIAN NIGHT'S ENTERTAINMENT, No. 1,002.

One morning the harem guards, on opening the garden gate of Razhib Pasha's magnificent palace on the shore of the Bosphorus, were alarmed to find the dead body of a handsome youth propped up against the portal.

Examination of the body elicited the following facts:

The youth had been stabbed with some pointed, sharp-edged weapon, apparently a knife or dagger, for two wounds were found in his left side, both evidently caused by the same weapon. One of the wounds was a flesh wound, and by no means dangerous, as if some weak and unskilled hand had dealt the blow; the other went straight through to the heart, and must have proved fatal on the instant. In addition to these terrible marks there was, on the neck of the dead youth, the deep impression of two rows of human teeth—two sharply defined rows, without the slightest blur or defect visible.

In the belt of the murdered man were found his pistols, their ivory butts handsomely inlaid with silver, and his dagger, with hilt of mother of pearl, sheathed in a richly jewelled and enamelled case. On his fingers sparkled costly rings, and in his turban was his purse, containing five-and-twenty gold *zechines*.

Evidently this was not a case of robbery, but of murder, actuated by hatred or revenge.

The murdered youth was recognised as Alnuman Aga, only son of the great general, Razhib Pasha, and was known throughout the city as the flower of Turkish gallantry, the petted favourite of the ladies, the pride, hope, and comfort of his proud and ambitious father.

During three whole days trumpets were sounded and drums beaten in streets, squares, and market-places, and town-criers gave notice to the populace of Stamboul that whoever should denounce the murderer of Alnuman Aga, or give him up to justice, would receive ten bags of money and a free pardon for all complicity in that or any other crime committed, as well as protection against all danger arising from his denouncement of the principal murderer.

One bag of money meant one thousand piastres; accordingly ten bags, ten thousand piastres; and at that time the piastre was worth sixteen times as much as it is at present. Verily, a goodly price for a single word—the name of one man.

Of yet weightier consequence than the promise of money was that second promise of free pardon to any accomplice in the deed; for, no doubt, there was an accomplice. A single man could not have killed Alnuman Aga, who was a sturdy youth, well built and muscular, highly trained in all bodily exercise, and brave and skilful in fight.

But the surest proof of the existence of an accomplice was found in the ugly mark on the neck of the dead man. Assuredly there had been two—one who bit fiercely and stabbed weakly, and the other who thrust home with one fatal blow.

It is an old saying, and generally found true, that a secret shared by two is no secret at all, for sooner or later one of the accessories is sure to betray it. Moreover, here was the double inducement of pecuniary gain and immunity from punishment. Surely, whenever those two look at each other, the one cannot help considering how much the other's head is worth to him, while the other suspects the thought, and naturally tries to anticipate the action in order to save himself.

Yet, in spite of that clear calculation, in spite of drums, bugles, and town-criers, the murder remained a mystery, for it had never entered the head of the wise speculators that there exists in life a tie which unites two individuals in one. Husband and wife, although two in person, are in soul and mind but one.

The quarter of the Seven Minarets is the chosen settlement of the Armenian residents at Stamboul. Of the celebrated seven minarets at present only four remain standing, three of them having been destroyed by an earthquake; but the azure-coloured copper globes of the remaining four shine far out into the distance, as the rays of the setting sun fall upon them.

In the vicinity of these slender minarets, the Armenian church stands, a plain, modest, unassuming edifice. It

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has no steeple, no sculptured images of saints, nothing to adorn it save coloured painting within and without.

Attached to the church is a smaller stone building, the residence of "The White Priest," the pastor of the Armenians.

The Armenian church was poor, and had no worldly possessions whatever. No tithe was paid to the priest, no fee was due to him. He had no other income than the voluntary offerings of his flock to their shepherd, and his worldly welfare rested entirely upon the strength of their religious ardour.

Still, some of these priests did very well, as, for instance, Makarios, the white priest of the district of the Seven Minarets. Not only was this district one of the largest and wealthiest, holding the most prominent and prosperous Armenian citizens of the town; but, as a priest who was keenly alive to the duties and the interests of his vocation, Makarios had found means to make his holy office an unceasing fountain of gain; so much so, indeed, that there soon was not one sheep in his flock which was not sorely aware of the religious zeal of his shepherd.

This ingenious man had impressed upon his parishioners the urgent necessity of yearly consecration of their dwellings, for which ceremony a certain sum of money had to be paid to the officiating priest. Marriages, christenings, funerals, etc., had each a complicated number of new rites and observances, for the execution of which the priest was duly paid. Masses for the benefit of the departed souls were read, messages to heaven or purgatory accepted and dispatched, responses given—and all for a pecuniary consideration, which was levied in accordance with the means of employer.

Of course, the fee for absolution was in accordance with the sin committed, and with the wealth of the sinner. With a poor man, a great crime became an insignificant matter, whereas, with rich folks, a small error grew into a horrid sin, which could not be bought off too dear.

From the sky-blue cupolas of the remaining four minarets the last glimmer of sunlight had faded away. The noise in the streets had ceased, the whip-cracks of the camel drivers, and the shrill cries of the water sellers gave way to the barking and howling of the stray dogs which infest the streets of Stamboul at night; and the sand of the streets, disturbed by busy passers, and whirling about in clouds, began to settle down again—the sure forerunner of night.

Makarios, the white priest, was looking out through the grating of his iron gate into the vault-like entrance of his house, and watching the people pass before it, when a female figure caught his attention.

Trumpets were sounded.

It was a most striking figure, remarkable for ugliness.

The woman's gait was halting, and she leant heavily on a stout stick she carried; evidently she was very lame.

Over one of her eyes she wore a big, black patch or plaster, showing that she was half blind, and her face was marked with the purplish scars of small-pox, while her scanty, soiled and tattered garments showed her to be poor almost to destitution.

She stood before the paintings on the entrance wall shuddering visibly as she looked at the wretches writhing in purgatorial flames.

After a while, she sighed, turned out to the street, and shuffled away.

But she came back again, this time gazing at the happy lot of the redeemed, casting a yearning look at the confessional and the gate in the dark background.

Still she hesitated, as if something yet more dreadful than fear of everlasting torture kept her back, and again she limped out and moved away.

But there seemed to be some powerful attraction for her in these paintings, for she stood a third time before them, looking wistfully at both sides, trembling and shuddering, and yet undecided.

As she held in her hands a couple of fowls tied together with a piece of twine, she was evidently contemplating confession, for poor people pay for their shrove-tickets with poultry; but her hesitation showed that her conscience was burdened by some heavy sin, and that she was afraid of the penance.

As she stood thus, undecided whether to give way to her conscientious scruples, or to listen to the cautioning of policy, one of the cocks which she held in her hands began to crow, and, startled by the sound of St. Peter's warning, her resolution was confirmed.

She drew herself up slightly, sighed, and then went boldly towards the grating to crave admittance of the priest.

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Makarios had hastened to his box, and was already waiting for her when she limped in, and knelt down before him.

"What sin burdens you?" asked the priest.

"I have taken human life," sobbed the woman.

"Wilfully or accidentally?"

"Wilfully."

"A man or woman's?"

"A strong man's."

"What was your motive—revenge or robbery?"

"Self-defence. He assailed me, and I killed him to free myself."

"Have you known him long?"

"He was my constant persecutor."

"Was he a Christian or a Jew?"

"Neither; he was a Turk."

"And do you think that such a heinous crime can be absolved for a couple of cockerels?"

"I am poor. My husband is a porter in the bazaar, and I sell soup at the corner of the Médres. Still, I have some savings, and have brought them with me in this purse. Pray, take it."

Makarios took the soiled and worn purse, and emptied its contents in his lap. The piastres, as they lay on his white robe, looked strikingly red.

"This is all counterfeit money," said he to the woman.

"If it is I did not make it," said she; "I got it, as it is from my customers."

"So you sell soups? Did you say at the corner of the Médres?"

"I said so."

"Then you told me a lie. The breath of the woman who sells soups at street corners is foul with the smell of garlic, and not sweet with the odour of roses, as yours is. The wives of bazaar porters and carriers do not eat rose-confections to perfume their breath. It is the habit of rich women, and you are one of them. You meant to deceive me, but you have deceived yourself; for, if I had listened to your confession, and absolved you in your disguise, that poor, lame, blind, ugly woman at the corner of the Médres, whom you have painted yourself to resemble, would have been admitted into Paradise and feasted with St. Basil, while you would have gone to the purgatorial flames. Therefore, if you are really repentant, and wish to be purged of your sins, go you to the well in the courtyard, wash off those painted scars from your face, take off those black patches from your eyes, and leave off your pretended limp. Then, if you return to me, I shall listen to your confession."

The woman did as he directed. She went to the well as an old, ugly, crippled hag, and she returned as a young, fair and graceful woman, proud in bearing, and conscious of her beauty.

"Now I know you, my daughter," said Makarios, recognising the fairy in rags; "you are the handsome Zabella, wife of the wealthy Tafruj, who could call himself a Zariadri, if, by bearing the famous old name, he did not fear to offend the Turks. Now, kneel down, and tell me your tale. You have murdered a man—a Turk. Who was he?"

"His name was Alnuman Aga, and he was the only son of the mighty Grand Vizier, Razhib Pasha."

"H'm! h'm! Alnuman Aga, indeed! But how did it all happen? Stay, let me question you. If I am not mistaken—and I certainly am not—you sell plate, jewellery, and costly weapons in the bazaar, and your beauty serves you as a bait to lure youthful and gallant buyers to your stand? Confess truly; Alnuman Aga was drawn on by your sparkling eyes, and the smile which showed him your pearly teeth. You pressed his hand, and whispered to him, so that he would buy your precious wares without haggling over your prices. Don't shake your head, for you cannot deny it. You left a printed copy of your sharp-edged teeth on the neck of the murdered youth, when you sucked his life-blood, you vampire!"

"As God is my witness," sobbed the woman, "I tell you the truth. I never lured Alnuman Aga to our shop—never noticed him at all. He sent an old woman with the *naame* to me, before I ever set eyes on his face."

"Aha, the *naame!*—the embroidered purse full of dried flowers, which speak in their own language to fair women, and are understood. You picked out those you wanted to keep, and returned the rest as an answer?"

"No; I returned the *naame* without breaking the seal, and I told the old woman never to come to me again. But Alnuman Aga did not take that for an answer. He watched for my husband's departure from the bazaar, and then he came and began to recite flower-rhymes and love songs to me."

"And you listened with delight?"

"I made the sign of the cross, and said: 'Begone from me, Satanas!' But he laughed, and tried to win my favour by presents of corals and pearls, sparkling gems and rings, set with precious stones."

"Which you accepted, and hid from the eyes of your husband?"

"Which I threw at his feet immediately. I even tried to spoil my beauty, so as not to attract him."

"You acted foolishly. You should have accepted all his presents, and brought them to me, your confessor. The gift of the libertine would thus have become the offering of an ardent soul."

"He threatened me; he told me that if I would not accede to his wishes he would kill my husband; and my Zariadri is such a gentle, tender-hearted man that he could not kill an animal, much less do harm to a human being. I am sure that if a thief should steal his money he would not find it in his heart to have him prosecuted for the theft."

"You mean to say that he is a coward?"

"He is as brave as the best of men, but his heart is kind, and his disposition gentle. When Alnuman Aga threatened to kill my husband, I told him I should go to Razhib Pasha and tell him of his son's wishes and intentions."

"Razhib Pasha would have served your impudence rightly if you had dared to carry out your threat."

"Razhib Pasha loves my husband."

"Yes, as I love these nice fowls. Go on with your confession."

"Alnuman Aga laughed again, and said he would come to visit me when my husband would be absent from home. I told him that in such cases my husband locks the house and takes the key with him, and that I was not one of those women who keep rope-ladders for the accommodation of lovers."

"Don't praise your virtues to me: I sit here to listen to your vices."

"Four days ago, in the evening, I was at home alone, I was standing at the window of my room, looking out into the garden. I watched the butterflies hovering round the pomegranate blossoms, and my mind was so pure and tranquil that I am sure I had not one sinful thought."

"Thou art never sure of that, daughter. Watching butterflies is in itself sinful in woman."

"If so, I have heavily atoned for the sin. While

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standing there, suddenly I felt a strong arm about my waist, and turning round in affright, I beheld the glowing eyes of Alnuman Aga. 'What have you done with my husband?' I cried in dismay, endeavouring to extricate myself from his arms, and trying to avert my face from the sickening gaze of his eyes. 'He is in the wine shop,' said he, laughing, 'and I stole from him

"I watched the butterflies."

the key to your room. Now you are mine!' As he uttered these words, a deadly faintness crept over my heart, and I felt as if I should sink down dead at his feet. My eyes closed before the demoniac gaze of the fiend before me, and I broke down, while the hot breath of the victorious scoundrel swept my face."

"Go on, don't stop—go on, I say."

"In that awful moment, my dying senses caught the sound of well-known footsteps in the adjoining hall; the door to my room flew open, and Zariadri Tafruj stood before me—not intoxicated by drink, but proud, and stately, and handsome, as in the blessed hour of our betrothal. The invigorating blood rushed to my heart, ecstatic delight, triumphant joy, filled me with giant strength; I forgot that I was a woman and weak. Violated love and fidelity, the presence of my wrongly-accused husband, all tended to increase my hatred, my thirst for an immediate and deadly revenge. Alnuman Aga wore a dagger in his belt. Swiftly I seized it, and stabbed him in the side. But I saw the blow had been too weak, and, with the fury of a tigress I encircled his neck with my arm, my teeth went deep into his flesh, and, drawing the dagger from the wound, I leant the hilt against my bosom, and, pressing the struggling wretch to me, drove the dagger deep into his treacherous heart. This is the story of the murder of Alnuman Aga."

"And is this all? Have you nothing more to confess?"

"What more should there be to say?".

"Did not your husband help you in this fatal business? Did you do all and he stand idly by?"

"The deed is mine alone. After it had been done, and could not be helped or undone, we swathed the corpse in sheets, seated it on a mule, and brought it to the gate of Razhib Pasha's garden, where we left it. Nobody had seen us, nobody would have suspected us, and the secret would have remained a secret for ever if my conscience had not troubled me ever since. I have no rest, no peace, night or day. Waking or sleeping, I see the distorted features of the murdered man, and through his parted lips an expiring cry seems to ring for ever and ever in my ears. It is as if I could see his soul, rent from the body, soar, like some frightened bird, above my head. I hear his dying groans, and my hands are reeking with his streaming blood. No human tongue accuses me, but my conscience cries out; and what help is it to me if nobody knows it, when the Almighty has witnessed my crime? For four days the phantom of my sin has haunted me, and I can bear it no longer. Here I have come to you, my confessor, the earthly representative of my heavenly Redeemer. You can help me. Absolve me of my crime, and give me back peace of conscience, tranquility of mind and soul!"

"My daughter, what you ask is not so easy. It is an awful crime—the cruel murder of the Grand Vizier's only son. That cannot be atoned for and bought off by a little fasting or praying, a pilgrimage, a couple of fowls, and a petty purse of bad coins, of which the silver is almost entirely worn off, and nothing left but the copper."

"I am ready, for any penance and sacrifice, if you will only tell me what to do."

"That is right, and now listen. For nine days you shall eat nothing to appease your hunger but a piece of bread, and drink nothing to quench your thirst but the drops of dew that you can gather from the leaves of the aloe in early morning. Thrice daily you must attend holy service at church, and each time you come you must kneel down before the altar, and make the circuit of it on your knees seven times. Finally, you must send five bags of money—but, mind you, good, full, weighty piastres—this very evening to me, to be used for the clearing of your soul. You may go."

Zabella went home, and Makarios received the five bags of piastres the same evening.

When, on the next day, the woman appeared at church to begin her penance, the priest watched her, and after service, called her to him, and said:

"I was mistaken yesterday, my daughter, in thinking that the slight penance which I laid on you would suffice to wash away your sin. Your crime is so heavy that

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it cannot be bought off for less than five more bags of money."

Makarios received the required sum, but by the next morning he had found that again five more were necessary, and so on for nine subsequent days, until the wealthy Zariadri Tafruj had become a beggar, and the handsome Zabella had given up into his hands the last piece of her jewellery—her pretty earrings, her heavy bracelets, and her costly pearls.

Still Makarios' coffers were not filled, his greed not satisfied, for when, at last, the weeping woman said: "Now, father, this is the last you can take from me. I have nothing left that is worth the asking or the keeping. These are the last things of value in my possession. Now give me your absolution and the shrove-ticket, for which I have paid with hard penance and the loss of all my earthly possessions"—he made

"Give me your absolution."

answer with a mocking smile, laying his clumsy, fat hand on her dishevelled locks.

"Not so, my daughter. You are not yet stripped of all valuables, for this beauteous head of yours is worth ten bags of money to one who means to have them."

The poor woman shook the hand of the priest from her head, rose from her knees, and went home.

Ten bags of money had he said—that was the price offered by Razhib Pasha for the head of the murderer of his son!

Makarios was not a lazy man by any means, and he lost no time in betraying the secret of Zabella's confession to Razhib Pasha.

The Grand Vizier listened as the priest related the story of the murder, and, after it was finished, he said, with a grim smile: "I believe that thy tale is true; therefore, stay here, and wait for the reward which thou hast merited; it shall not fail thee;" and with that he led the priest to an inner room, where he left him in the guard of Tsoglani.

Razhib Pasha filled the foremost position among the four hundred grand viziers of the Osman realm, and he was one of the exalted two hundred who could not die at the hand of the executioner. His government was renowned for the perfect order he established throughout the whole dominion, and for the skill with which he managed to keep the treasury of the State at all times well filled. As a man, he was notorious for cruelty and the extraordinary ingenuity which he exercised in devising punishments for his victims. It is related of him that, when appointed governor of Egypt, he kept the death sentence of twenty-five infidel beys, leaders of the reigning class of their time, a secret for nearly four years. During all that time he counselled with them, dined with them, and so on, until, at the end of the fourth year, he finally got all twenty-five of them together at his hospitable table; when, after the coffee had been served, he had all their twenty-five heads cut off in one pretty row.

This was the man to whom Makarios, the white priest, had denounced the fair Zabella for the murder of Alnuman Aga. A Christian woman, who had killed his only son—the flower of Turkish youth, the gallant hero of battles, own grandson to the Sultan Mahoud; for Szalika, wife of Razhib Pasha, the mother of Alnuman Aga, was a daughter of the Badishah.

After Razhib Pasha had left Makarios, and re-entered his own room, he at once sent for the Armenian bishop.

When that holy man arrived, the Grand Vizier asked:

"Is confession a sacrament with you?"

"Certainly," replied the bishop.

"What punishment is meet for the priest who betrays the secrets of holy confession?"

"He is condemned to be burned to death," said the bishop.

"Very good," said Razhib Pasha; "here, take my tablets, and note down your sentence."

* * * * *

Zabella's heart was full of despair as she left the white priest, and bent her steps homeward.

Arrived at her house, she told her husband of the threat Makarios had uttered, which involved her death sentence.

"So this pretty head is not yours any more?" said Zariadri, tenderly caressing her soft cheek, and pressing her burning forehead to his bosom; "will you give it to me, then?"

"Take it, and do with it as you will," said she, kissing his caressing hand.

"Then shut your eyes, and open your mouth."

The woman obeyed, wondering; but hardly had she done so, when his fingers were at her teeth, and, with one deft movement, he had extricated one of the white pearls from the upper front row, leaving an ugly gap in its place.

The startled woman had had no time to cry out; the operation was already performed, and, without a word of explanation, the man left the house, leaving her in a state of utter bewilderment.

Zariadri went straight to Razhib Pasha's residence, and asked for admittance.

"What do you want of me, my son?" asked that illustrious statesman, when the Armenian was brought into his presence.

"I have come to give up to justice the murderer of your son."

"You are too late," said the Pasha, "another has

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preceded you, and I already know who committed the deed."

"Impossible! As nobody else was present at the deed, nobody else can know the name of the doer. You have been deceived, and I am here to convince you of it. Know, then, that I, Zariadri Tafruj, killed Alnuman Aga, your son."

"You! Zariadri Tafruj! You tell me that you slew my son? Are you not afraid of the tortures of purgatory? The liar goes to the flames, as well as the murderer; have you not been taught this lesson?"

"What I have told is the truth."

"It is not the truth. Your wife killed my son; the marks of her teeth are on his neck."

"Of my teeth, oh, Pasha! Look—the marks on your son's neck were made by two entire rows of teeth, such as mine; my wife has a gap in the upper row of her front teeth, as you may see for yourself, if you like. I repeat it, I am the murderer of your son."

"Well, well, Zariadri Tafruj! You are a good husband, but consider whether it is well for a Christian to love his wife more than his soul's salvation. Are you not afraid of Satan and the flames? Possibly you are a sceptic as I am. Our sages tell us that of all human bones the hip-bone alone does not decay, and remains entire until the day of resurrection, when, according to the size and shape of this bone, the whole body will be reconstructed. Now, I have seen many of these bones, and not one of them showed any marks of having been in the fire. Accordingly, I do not believe in a purgatory. You smile? You had better wait until I have finished. I have told you that I do not believe in the flames beyond this world, and as I am resolved that the murderer of my son, if he be a man, shall not escape infernal torment, I have made sure by transporting it to this world. As you know, the moment of death, or, to speak more properly, of dying, is bad enough in itself; yet its agony can be increased or lessened, and its pain and duration are different in individuals. Now, for instance, if the murderer of my son should be a woman, she would certainly be put to death; but as no man delights in torturing a woman she would simply be thrown into the Bosphorus. A few bubbles would rise to the surface of the water, and if, as you Christians will have it, woman also has a soul, those airy bubbles would possibly rise higher than human eye can see. But that would be the end of all. Whereas, if the murderer of my son be a man, he may well curse the day and hour of his birth, for I shall send him to perdition, indeed. He shall take such a journey that the infernal regions beyond shall appear as a place of rest and recreation to him."

"So this pretty head is not yours any more?"

"I know that, and am prepared for the worst," said Zariadri firmly, though his face was very pale.

"No, you are not; but you shall presently understand me better. Go out into the courtyard of my palace, to the square of the Tsoglani. When Sultan Achmed fastened the sign of the half-moon to the cupola of the Aga Sophia—the church of the celestial wisdom—he had the double cross and the ball on which it rested brought to the ground, and carried hither to this place of the Tsoglani at our palace. This double cross and the ball on which it stands are both of thick copper. Ever since the day of my son's death, that ball and cross serve the purpose of a furnace, and are heated till they glow like the live coals inside them. This is the fiery torture which I have prepared for the murderer of my son, if he be a man. With metal chains attached to this terrible structure, his hands shall be manacled, and his body raised up upon the fiery cross. Go out, I say. Look well at the preparations I have made, and then, when you have taken time to consider, return to me, if you dare, and remind me of the confession you have made to me! Until then, I shall forget it."

Zariadri Tafruj went out as the Pasha had commanded him, and strolled slowly down to the square of the Tsoglani, where the cross of the Aga Sophia had, in consequence of its enormous weight, already sunk down deep into the ground whereon it rested.

Only one-half of the huge ball and the second cross rose up high above the lawn.

At this time, the grass was singed off all round, and half-nude assistants of the executioner fed the fire in this giant furnace. Smoke, flakes of ashes, and glowing cinders were flying about, and the atmosphere, heated and thinned by the fire, invested this awful object of Christian faith with a flickering red haze.

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Tafruj stood trembling before this wild scene.

Razhib Pasha had not exaggerated, and there was no doubt that the man who was to give up his soul on this glowing cross would suffer all the pains and tortures which pandemonium can inflict. Verily, the unhappy

The women of fashion appeared on their favourite promenade.

victim of the Grand Vizier's revenge must be a saint, if that endless hour of horrid agony, without the relief of merciful unconsciousness, did not make him blaspheme God and curse mankind and their fiendish inventions.

Long, long did he look on, watching the molten gold drip down, like glittering drops of perspiration, and listening with a sick heart to the clumsy jokes of the brutal hangman's slaves.

One of the fellows asked him if he had no inclination to touch the images of the saints of the fiery ball. He turned away shuddering; and yet it was only the tip of his finger that they asked him to lay on it.

It was late in the evening when he entered the palace again. He was at once received by the Grand Vizier.

"Well, my son, how do you like death in that form?" asked Razhib Pasha.

"It is terrible."

"Are you afraid?"

"I shudder and tremble."

"And what have you come to tell me?"

"I have come to deliver myself up into your hands. Much as I dread this terrible death, I am a man—and I love my wife. Do your worst, Pasha. I am the murderer of Alnuman Aga."

At a motion of the Pasha's hand, a sedan chair was brought into the room.

"Sit down in this chair," said the Pasha to the bewildered Zariadri, "for I am going to keep my promises. First of all, you will find in this chair ten bags of money, which you have earned, for you have given up the murderer of my son into my hands. But, even if he were guilty himself, I cannot harm you, and you need fear no danger from me or anybody. And now let me give you this warning: your wife, whom you love well, and who deserves your love, you shall henceforth keep locked into your own house, so that her dangerous beauty may not cause the death of more youths as Alnuman Aga, my only, my dearly beloved son;" and two tears trickled down the Pasha's cheeks, and rolled into his grey beard.

Tafruj, dumfounded, and hardly in possession of his wits, was borne out by the Tsoglani; and, at every movement of the chair, the silver money in the bags gave a soft, musical clink.

Through gloomy halls and dark corridors they reached the courtyard, and there, vividly rising out of the dark night, stood the spectral apparition of the glowing cross.

In a wide quadrangle round it, a file of soldiers stood, forming a wall, so that from the outside it was impossible to observe what was going on in the interior of the quadrangle.

On this place, the Tsoglani set down the sedan-chair with the frightened Zariadri, who, looking out, beheld the form of an *imam*, standing on a high pile of stones, just opposite the fiery cross.

Presently the Turkish fifers blew a solemn choral, and the all-significant tune froze the blood of Zariadri's veins, for this was the air which accompanied the doomed criminal to the place of execution.

When the last shrill note had died away, the *imam* on the stone pile took out a leather scroll from his belt, unfolded it, and, in a monotonous chant, read its contents aloud as follows:

"The great Bishop, the Saint of Mount Ararat, the Messenger of Salvation at Etzmiatzin, has pronounced the following sentence:

"'The priest who betrays the secret of Holy Confession, shall be brought from life to death by fire!'

"This sentence is confirmed and ratified by the Glorious General and Grand Vizier, Razhib Pasha, and is to be carried into instant execution."

The *imam* nodded, the kettle-drums sounded, and in the next instant, a human form was raised up by chains, and placed upon the fiery cross.

No, not a human form; but a ghastly spectre in white, which, with the writhings of a tortured fiend, rolled on the glittering cross, managing by fearful exertions to jump from it, only to be thrown back again.

Each time the wretched body fell back, a black cloud of smoke rose from it; a hoarse, brutal roaring, as of a wild beast in the utmost pain, accompanied by terrible oaths, cursing Heaven and earth, conjuring up the Evil One, and then again crying out for death and mercy, rent the air.

Gladly would Zariadri Tafruj have escaped witnessing this horrible spectacle, but the door of the sedan-chair was locked on him, and the Tsoglani kept him a prisoner.

To the ghastly end he was compelled to stay, and look at the tortures to which he had resigned himself, and to which he would have been delivered if Razhib Pasha had not loved justice as he, Zariadri Tafruj, loved his wife.

When at last the mangled body of Makarios, the white priest, had ceased to writhe, when the beastly howls had died away on the lips, the vivid flames broke

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forth between them, enveloping and consuming the spectral form, the sedan-chair, with Zariadri Tafruj, was taken up again by its bearers, and conveyed to his own house, where he and his ten bags of money were put into safe care and custody of the happy Zabella.

Thus did Razhib Pasha, of whom Turkish historians proclaim that he was *insrani kamil*—a perfect man—deal out justice.

* * * * *

On the next day Razhib Pasha issued the decree which, under the pain of death, ordered all Turkish women, without distinction of rank, wealth, or position, to wear the *feredshe*—that ugly garment which hides all beauty of form and face, and sheathes the wearer like a wooden casing. And ever since, all the bewitching finery of Turkish fashion—the embroidered slipper, the graceful scarf, the transparent veil, etc.—are, under pain of death, strictly confined to the interior of the house.

Not that the women have not tried to ridicule the decree, and show their opposition.

On the very day of the proclamation, the women of fashion appeared on their favourite promenade—the bank of the Bosphorus—clad in their utmost enchanting garments, showing off their own beauty and the splendour of their attire.

The lovely pero, Sheytan Emisnezy, was foremost among them, and a new and ingenious invention of hers—to use the glow-worm of Mount Hasmus to illuminate her toilet—drew a train of admirers to her elbow, and struck envy to the hearts of the other women.

"Go home, my beauty; do not wait for the *meuzzin* to sing out the evening," said Pelvem Aga, the giant leader of the Imperial guards, to the fair Siren, as she playfully slapped his hand with her peacock-fan, and made a trumpet of a copy of the Sultan's decree, which he had showed her as warning.

What do you think of "The Rajah's Treasure" in the July "Pearson's."

But she laughed at the "pain of death," and waited for the evening to show her illuminated dress to the greatest advantage; and like her did all the other idle, frivolous, and vain women mock at the awful threat, and so did the throng of their foolish admirers.

But when the *meuzzin's* song had announced the hour of night, and Sheytan Emisnezy again stood before Pelvem Aga, the guard, showing him her marble shoulders, that giant caught her up at her gridle, and with a powerful effort hurled her into the Bosphorus, so that, as Tzi, the historian, says, the blue waves of the sea clad her beauteous body.

This was the signal for the guards to set to work, and each of them caught one of the crying, frightened, silly women, and hurled her into the sea. Thus three hundred young, fair, and fashionable women met with sudden and terrible death.

Since that night no Turkish woman appears in the street without the *feredshe*.

And this is the story of that garment.

S. J. M.

BRAIN GYMNASIUM: RESULT of No. 8 Competition.

Of the competitors who entered for the BRAIN GYMNASIUM, No. 8, not one was entirely correct. Mr. T. Tanner, 74, Hampton Park, Bristol, Mr. C. Sutton, 11, York Road, West Hartlepool, and Mr. S. Mason, Hawkhead Terrace, 31, Seahill Road, Paisley, succeeded in answering nine out of the ten, and, therefore, to them has been forwarded the prize of fourteen shillings each. The following are the names and addresses of those to whom we have awarded consolation prizes:

P. H. Arme, Panama House, Drayton Road, Leytonstone; S. A. Howe, Lowfield Boarding School, Sheffield; W. B. Scholefield, 42, Rawcliffe Road, Walton, Liverpool; L. W. Judd, 2, Alfred Villas, Stanton Road, Barnes; H. Wightman, 251, Park Lane, Tottenham, N.; A. M. Trivess, 4, Graham Road, Southsea, Hants; Mrs. K. Lamb, 45, Lord Street, Crewe; M. Senior, 585, Abbeydale Road, Sheffield; C. H. Jones, 23, Musgrave Crescent, Walham Green; S. A. Green, Well Close House, Fenton, Staffordshire; J. B. Crane, 183, Hollydale Road, Peckham; H. Cheeseright, 40, Granby Street, Liverpool; Miss E. Pinnel, 42, Ainger Road, N.W.; B. Smith, 8, Hemans Street, Liverpool; J. Manby, 1, Upper Bow, Edinburgh; C. B. Keston, "Woodville," Christchurch Road, Bournemouth; W. G. Ayers, 86, North Birkbeck Road, Leytonstone; Miss E. Hill, "Fair Lawn," Castlenau, Barnes; H. Beswick, 36, Gilmore Street, Stockport; Mrs. Dwelly, 266, King's Road, Kingston Hill; M. Griffith, Plasnewydd, Ruabon; F. Croft, Plas Power Colliery, near Wrexham, North Wales.

KEY OF No. 8 COMPETITION.

No. 71.

O	mnibu	S.
U	na	U.
T	ornad	O.
R	ecapitulat	E.
A	chin	G.

No. 72.

a=1. e=2. i=3. o=4. u=5. b=6. c=7. s=8. d=9. t=0.

Some months before his death, he placed in my hands a large old-fashioned pocket-book, bidding me lock it up and keep it safely for him.

No. 73.

1. Y O U R.
   O G R E.
   U R G E.
   R E E D.

2. W I L L.
   I D E A.
   L E N T.
   L A T E.

No. 74.

```
        C
      R O E
    C A N D Y
  P R O C T O R
D U C K L I N G S
  W R O U G H T
    M U D D Y
      L E A
        D
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No. 75.—Attention, 181.

No. 76.

3 hours 24 minutes from the time of opening fire. 1,984 British Guardsmen left.

No. 77.

A pre-occupied man assimilates every word that is spoken to the subject of his own pre-occupation. When he enters into tender confidences, he speaks in ambiguously bashful hints, not in the precise language wherewith he would draw up his will.

No. 78.—Roundabout.

No. 79.—£4 12s. 6d.

No. 80.—1,055

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THE HALF-BREED.

An Out-of-the-Way Romance.

"CLAVERING—Herbert Clavering."

Carhart put out a hand, with a rush of incoherent words. Of all men, to find Clavering here!

Clavering gave him but little opportunity to put questions. His surprise had been less demonstrative than his friend's; but a twitching of the muscles of the mouth denoted that this meeting had not quite left him unaffected. He began to question Carhart himself—rapidly, a little nervously, scarce waiting for his replies. He was travelling? He had come with a view to making some study of the Indian settlement still taking up the farther slope of the mountain? A sketching tour? And so he still kept these things up?

"You are my guest for to-night, whatever your plans. In any case, those clouds bode no good to travellers in these wilds. I can't give you hotel fare. But, perhaps, you will put up with something plainer for the sake of old friendship and old days."

As he spoke, Carhart was realising the full change that had befallen the man who once—and that but a few years before—appeared so placid amid the great ranks of active strugglers, and so endowed for the brilliant work and the glittering results of life, that his rapid climb to wordly eminence was accounted one of the inevitable sequence. Alas for the rock against which this promising career had shivered almost at its outset! But why desert? That was what Clavering had done. Better, Carhart thought, as he looked at him, have made an attempt to float the ship anew to weather the gale.

With the life of the natives, he had adopted their mode of dress and something of their gait and manner. This seemed to Carhart to have been done out of a sort of bravado—as a species of flaunting assurance that he was amply content with the changed conditions of existence he had chosen. He had aged in these five years. There were on his face bitter lines and hard lines, that silently spoke the disappointment he would have doggedly denied. Carhart saw that however much he might regret the rash step which had led him to leave his native England and the world, and bury himself in these mountain wilds, he would never open his lips in confession of his mistake.

The black cloud had rolled downward, blotting the further peaks from sight, and in the deepening purple light that filled the air, the small loghouse stood out in sharpened relief beside its patches of stunted pines, vividly green.

Carhart dismounted from his horse and followed Clavering across the threshold with some singular sensations. The latter caught the fleeting expression on his face.

"You don't get over your surprise at finding one at this remote distance from your vaunted civilisation."

"Of course I am surprised. You left no tracks behind you."

"My determination to break with all your sophistication was clearly enough announced."

"Yes, I knew the life you meant to lead. Nevertheless I was surprised to find you here."

"You did not believe I would carry out my resolve?"

laughed Clavering shortly. "You see that you were mistaken."

The rain had come on in a sudden rush of wind that chased whirling leaves wildly before it. The taller pines bent and swayed; it had grown sombrely dark in the bare room.

Clavering—a powerful figure in high boots, loose flannel shirt, short jacket—stood an instant in the doorway, and looked out at the fierce conflict of the unchained elements. Then he turned and hung up his soft, wide-brimmed hat against the wall.

"As I told you before, you will have to put up with plain fare." Then Carhart became aware of the entrance of a young girl into the room. She was slim and supple as a willow bough as she moved, making deft preparations for the simple meal, with the smooth, sliding, grave step of the aboriginal race—the races that live close to the soil. Her straight black hair was bound up into heavy hanging braids. Her shy eyes looked out from under straight, black brows. She was very light—almost white.

Carhart had never believed in beautiful half-breeds. His eyes fastened themselves upon her until he felt their persistence an impertinence. His fingers itched to be at pencils and brushes and canvas.

When the storm passed away, it left an uneasy, shifting mass of torn clouds. A watery moon looked out in fitful gleams. Already the clayey soil was sucking up the moisture rapidly.

The two men stayed in the faintly illuminated darkness before the door. The short pipe in Herbert Clavering's bearded lips gave out at intervals a throbbing spark of pale red light.

There was a long silence. It was fraught, for Carhart, with anxious self-questionings, with hesitation. Finally he spoke.

"I shall be going on to-morrow morning, Clavering, and our meeting again is, I suppose, as things are, at least always a doubtful matter. So I have decided to touch upon a topic which it is possible you may prefer not to have broached. Whatever you may think of what may seem my interference, I think that I mean well. Leonora Ashley's husband has been dead two months. Did you know it?"

For an instant it was so still that the rasping of a cricket near by seemed to fill the whole night. Then—

"No, I did not know it," said Clavering. His tones were husky, strained. He controlled himself. But it had been a shock—it had been a shock!

Again there was a silence. At last, conscious of the tumult going on in the breast of the man beside him, Carhart could bear it no longer.

"I always thought you made a mistake—nay, more, that you committed a terrible folly, Clavering, five years ago!" he cried, all the latent irritation hot within him, and bred by the wantonness of his sacrifice of a brilliant life, breaking forth.

A groan burst from Clavering's lips.

"Sudden financial ruin had overtaken me; and—well, you know what she was to me, Carhart!"

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"Yes, I know that marriage and your money troubles together made you desert. For it was deserting. The place for a man like you is in the thick of the fight! What matter that a financial break-up had come to you! There was that in you which would have forced Fortune's favour anew. As for the other trouble—we are men, not children, Clavering!"

Suddenly, fiercely Clavering turned upon him.

"Why do you say all this now? Would you have me now go back to the thick of the fight, as you call it?"

"Why not? What right have you to hang back?"

Clavering gave a caustic laugh.

"I could tell you that the stragglers who have that much philosophy are doing the great army of strugglers, all intent on getting to the top, the most inestimable kindness! But I prefer to ask you what you think I could do in the centres of active life? I—who am out of time and touch with all men and things?"

"You have lost five invaluable years—yes. But to say that your mistake is irrevocable is an absurdity."

And then Carhart started, paused, forgetting his arguments, the hard-headed man of the world in him routed by a rushing forth of artist's soul that constituted the other side of his dual nature.

There a few feet away near the corner of the house, was that exquisite girl again. He was about to speak, to ask some question concerning her, when the man of the world came to the front anew, he said nothing.

The last impression he carried away with him from the log-house the next morning was that of the girl hanging back within the door as they rode off. Clavering accompanied him part of the way towards the Reservation. Her eyes followed them with a silent question; it seemed almost to Clavering, imaginative as he was, with a silent doubt, a silent anguish.

It was two weeks later, and Carhart was preparing to draw his sketching tour to an end. Looking up suddenly from his breakfast, he saw Clavering enter the inn, which here, fifteen miles from the Reservation, was dignified with the name of a hotel.

Carhart felt this coming significant. Had he any lingering doubts they were immediately dispelled.

"When do you start?" said Clavering. "I am going back with you."

There was a pause; then Carhart stretched out his hand across the table in silence.

* * * * *

The sun rose and set over the mountain. The days wore away. Flaring touches of crimson began to show against the cool green of the leaves.

At the log-house, amid the stunted pines, a silent figure went in and out. The girl shed no tears. He was gone. She had known always that some day it would be so. More than ever she had known it when that friend of his had come, the friend who belonged to the great world beyond the Reservation, beyond the mountain, of which she had learned at the mission school.

For she had been to the mission school, and she fell to trembling a little when she thought of the missionary—a gaunt, pale man with a holy fire in his eyes—who had baptised her. Ah, how good he had been! He had prayed over her, and adjured her steadfastly to walk with Christ.

She cowered on the doorstep, her slender hands against her cheeks.

Two strangers rode leisurely up in the mellow September afternoon. They talked lazily, their voices drifting towards her.

"No, marriages among whites and half-breeds are not common in this section. It would perhaps be better if they were."

The girl rose and went into the house. A fire of oak logs had been burning on the hearth. She sat down beside it, her arms clasped about her knees, her hair falling forward over her face. The afternoon wore slowly away. Through the glistening needles of the pine trees shafts of nebulous golden light began to stream. Near her was a large chest. She lifted the lid and slowly, reverently, took certain objects from it and laid them on the bed.

They were things he—Herbert Clavering—had given her. There were the fine little handkerchiefs marked with her name—"Annie," the name they had called her when she had been baptised at the mission chapel; and the yards of some soft light muslin she had never made up; and a pair of little shoes such as the women in town wore; and the trinkets he had said made her look like a young Eastern princess.

To her cheeks there had come a faint rose-like colour. Her eyes were like still water, in which the reflection of a star had sunk. She began to deck herself with the things she had taken from the chest. She was clothing herself in a strange freak of fancy for a mystic—a mythical marriage. If he and she were to be married this evening—married as once she had seen two people at the mission chapel, would she look like this? A small, blurred mirror threw back to her a picture she did not know. She had wound the yards of soft muslin about her body; she placed the trinkets about her neck and in her ears.

Athwart the long bar of sunlight that lay from the threshold of the open door across the floor a shadow had fallen. Annie looked up; she looked into his eyes—into the eyes of Herbert Clavering. They stood a moment thus—he motionless, she holding back with both hands the braids of her wavy hair. Then he spoke:

"Annie, I have come back."

She said nothing; she only trembled.

"Annie, I have come back to marry you."

Then only she gave a little, low cry.

"I am not worthy," she said.

His brow darkened.

"Never dare to say that. I thought I could go from you, Annie. I tried to. I meant to. I loved a woman once, and I heard four weeks ago that she was free. I thought to go back to her—to win her now if I could. But I was mistaken in my own heart. That love was dead. I did not see her. I came back to you, Annie. I will repair the wrong."

Herbert Clavering came nearer. He put out his hand and touched the geegaws on her arms.

"Take these things off. You shall have better than those. What were you doing arrayed in them? We won't live here, Annie. When we are married we will go elsewhere. I shall never belong quite to the active world again. But I can do better than this. There must be a new life. Kiss me, my wild flower."

* * * * *

In the course of a few weeks Carhart received a letter over which he sat long pensive.

"Well, who shall say it was not better so?" he murmured at last. "She was beautiful. Clavering was never like any other man. He will seek some new frontier town and make himself a power yet, perhaps. What eyes she had! Ah! one can never get those effects on canvas!"

And the artist sighed.

AGNES GIFFORD.

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Told at the Club.

Yes, I have been in America. A year or so ago I had occasion to make the trip, primarily with the idea of studying the tariff laws of the United States, a subject in which I was much interested, in view of my becoming a probable candidate for an English constituency, and, secondly, because I wanted a holiday after successfully carrying through a very long and arduous law case, which has become world-famous. Among other places I visited were the Yosemite Valley and San Francisco, and, while mixing with Chinamen, Mexican "greasers," and miners, I became desirous of obtaining a gold nugget in quartz. A stranger had, however, little chance of securing such a thing at a fair price, and after several attempts at dealing, I intrusted the commission to the clerk at the hotel at which I was staying, the Mercede II Capitaine. We have no idea in England of the manifold duties and infinite capacity of the American hotel clerk; nothing seems impossible for them to obtain, no task too difficult for them to perform—if they are well paid for it.

My clerk in due course found me a nugget, for which I paid him £120, and placing it in a neat cardboard box which I deposited in my dressing bag, I journeyed back to New York.

Arriving there, I proceeded to the Hotel Brunswick, and again re-questioning the hotel clerk, I deposited with him the cardboard box containing the nugget.

At the back of the desk in the hotel office stands the large iron safe in which the hotel clerk places any articles of value deposited with him by visitors to the hotel, and here I saw my cardboard box put away.

A stay of a few days was all I made prior to returning in the *Alaska*, and I remember that on the day she sailed I was somehow very much behindhand, and left the Brunswick in a great hurry. So much so that I forgot my nugget, and it was not until I was several streets away that I recollected it. I tore back, and the clerk opened the safe and handed me a box. Thanking him, I once more started off.

I will draw a veil over my passage home. It was winter, the voyage was very rough, and I was very ill. I hardly ever left my berth, and was entirely oblivious as to what happened to my belongings, which were scattered about all over the floor of my cabin. On my arrival at Liverpool, being still very weak, I scrambled them all together, and so they remained until I arrived at my chambers.

When I reached home, one of the first of a heap of telegrams and letters waiting for me that caught my eye was a cablegram. It was from the proprietor of the Hotel Brunswick in New York, and ran as follows: "Have given you wrong box. Do not part with it except as against your gold quartz."

This did not trouble me very much, and I only reviled the stupidity of the hotel clerk in giving me someone else's property, thinking of the trouble I should probably have in getting my own box and nugget in exchange for the box I had. Indeed, so little did I think of it that after a casual search for the box had ended unsuccessfully, owing to the mixed state in which my things were, thanks to the pitching of the *Alaska*, I postponed a further examination for a day or two.

A thorough overhauling ended in its discovery among some soiled linen, where it had probably fallen during the voyage. The box was almost identical with mine, but how different were the contents! I am no judge of precious stones, but I don't think I ever saw so magnificent a collection of unset pearls, diamonds, rubies, and emeralds all jumbled together in this wretched box, barely strong enough, one would have thought, to have held a dozen collars together. I am a very cautious individual, and my first thought was to discover the worth of what struck even an ignoramus on the subject, like myself, as being exceedingly valuable.

I closed up the box again and took it to an old established jeweller in Bond Street, who confirmed my conjecture as to the jewels being exceedingly valuable. He made a schedule of the contents, and roughly valued them at forty thousand pounds. Then, with overcaution, I took the box, this time inclosed in a cash-box, to my bankers and left it with them.

My next step was to cable to the manager of the Brunswick, thus: "Have box safe; cable particulars," and waited events. In two days the reply came: "Morgan, owner of property, left by *Servia*. Do not part with box except against your nugget."

I would here ask you to remark the repetition of the instructions not to part with the property of this man, Morgan, until he handed over my box and the gold quartz. There was probably nothing in it, but it struck me as peculiar, and I again cabled to the Brunswick for more information. The answer came shortly and brusquely: "Deliver property to holder of your nugget."

I must confess that my cautious nature rebelled against delivering up such valuable articles to an unknown person, even though authorised to do so by such a respectable person as the landlord of the hotel, who, judging by his last cable, was evidently angry at my pertinacity.

On the arrival of the *Servia* at Queenstown the

following Saturday, I received a telegram signed Morgan, informing me that he would be at my chambers the following Monday. Very reluctantly I withdrew the box from my bank, and bringing it home, had a last look at the gems. I had by now almost begun to look upon them as mine, and it was with a sigh that I returned them to their inclosure.

Punctually to his appointment did my visitor arrive, and my servant handed me a card, inscribed: "R. Morgan, Kansas City, U.S.A."

Morgan himself was an ordinary looking man, not undistinguishable from a score of other Americans I had seen in the bar at the Brunswick. He was fairly well dressed and possessed of easy manners. He handed me a note from the proprietor of the Brunswick, briefly introducing him as the owner of the property, and a dealer in precious stones, who brought my gold nugget against which I was to deliver his precious box. This seemed all right, and there was no doubt about my nugget, which he took out of the box and showed me. There seemed nothing left for me to do but to hand him the jewels, and yet, somehow, for the life of me, I could not prevail on myself to do so. I made the excuse that the stones were all safe at my banker's, and if he would call in a couple of days I should be happy to hand him his property.

He seemed somewhat surprised, and not a little vexed, which, perhaps, under the circumstances was natural, and before he left impressed upon me the necessity of his property being handed over when next he came.

After he had gone, I admit that I felt I had behaved somewhat foolishly. Everything seemed perfectly straightforward, and I had erred on the side of over-caution.

Morgan came punctually again, but this time he was less patient, and more fidgety than before, and evidently bore with my chatting with difficulty. Making an excuse, I left the room and quietly considered the matter, finally arriving at the conclusion that I had no excuse for not returning the property. This I at last proceeded to do, offering him as well some refreshment which he declined, politely, but firmly.

He was all through somewhat reticent, and surprised me by taking no trouble to verify the schedule of the stones, but one thing which puzzled me he easily explained. I could not understand why property of such value was carried in an ordinary cardboard box, a fit covering for a German toy or puzzle, but scarcely suitable for forty thousand pounds' worth of uncut stones. At my mention of their value his eyes certainly glistened, but his explanation was simple; there is an abnormally high duty on diamonds and precious stones imported into America, and dealers who go there often have to resort to all sorts of subterfuges to hoodwink the Customs officers. A cardboard box would be far more likely to escape the lynx-eyed searchers than a strong box. Finally we parted with every expression of goodwill, mutually regretting that we should both have incurred so much trouble through the stupid mistake of a hotel clerk.

* * * * *

It was the very next morning that I received another cable inquiring: "Do you know what is contained in Morgan's box?"

To this I replied as briefly as possible, and in the very smallest space of time imaginable came this dispatch: "Ten thousand dollars reward has been offered for his apprehension."

Scotland Yard had been duly informed, I learnt, and I ascertained, moreover, the full particulars of the case. Morgan had murdered and robbed a Maiden Lane jeweller, who had been his *compagnon de voyage*, and for weeks the New York police had been looking for him.

Inside of twenty-four hours the so-called Morgan was arrested at an obscure hotel in the East-end, and in due time was extradited.

What is, however, the curious part of the story is that the so-called Morgan with very little difficulty proved upon his trial that he was not the *compagnon de voyage* of the Maiden Lane jeweller and never saw him. Moreover, the Brunswick clerk swore positively that he was not the man he knew as Morgan, and that it was not he that deposited the box of gems in his keeping.

In consequence of this, the fellow was acquitted of the charge brought against him, and I believe the matter remains a mystery to the New York police to this day.

My own theory is that the accused man, while not the murderer of the jeweller, was a murderer, nevertheless, and that Morgan suffered the fate that he had inflicted upon the original owner of the gems.

I argue that when the real Morgan discovered that he had been left with the wrong box, he made a tremendous fuss in the bar of the Brunswick, and, no doubt, any number of strangers heard the facts, and even witnessed the writing and dispatch of the cable to me. Morgan was then watched, and when murdered, the letter of introduction, his card-case and papers, and, above all, the box containing the nugget, were taken from his body.

J. E. C.

Post-Card Competition.—No. 3.

A Guinea is offered to the first person who points out the longest word in this issue of *Short Stories* (not including cover) in which no letter occurs with a tail or a head—such as p, b, t, d, j. Example words: occurs, issue, manners. The word selected, *written on a post-card* (letters will be disqualified), should reach *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C., not later than Monday, July 20th.

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BY MISS WINIFRED GRAHAM.

Author of "When the Birds Begin to Sing," "Through the Valley," "Six First-class Passengers," etc., etc.

PAUPER BLUE BLOOD.

SUMMARY.

Georgina Pluff is a governess in the employ of the Ravenscrofts. Her charge is Eva, daughter of Sir Reginald and Lady Ravenscroft. Sefton, the only son, is engaged to Lady Norah Cannington, whose father, hearing on good authority of Sir Reginald's impending ruin, compels his daughter to write a letter to Sefton, saying that the engagement must be broken off. Before the financial crash arrives, Sir Reginald commits suicide in his own grounds, and Sefton's cup of bitterness is filled by the arrival of Lady Norah's letter.

CHAPTER IV.

The Sins of the Father.

Surely in the whole world there could not have been a sadder home than Ravenscroft Park. Not only had death lowered the blinds and darkened the doors, but death self-inflicted, and the utterly unexpected loss of wealth accompanying it.

Sefton had not torn the heartless note from Lady Norah, and flung it aside in disgust, he was too numb and petrified for anger. He folded it with trembling fingers, and placed it against his heart, feeling that everything in life had ended for him, the worst had come, he was broken—crushed—done for. It mattered not now what became of him, he felt reckless, desperate. Norah loved him no more—Norah was false. She would smile into other eyes, other lips would press the soft, sweet cheek. She would be the wife of another man. Oh! hateful thought, unbearable, galling. But for his great reverence and affection for his mother, and the memory of those haunting words: "Guard well the good old name," he would gladly have sought the gloomy spot on which his father died, and followed that parent's example.

Instead, he curbed the frantic longing, replaced mechanically his signet ring on his finger, and opened letters of condolence without grasping their meaning. It was always another ending, a different signature, he saw photographed in words of flame above the actual writing.

"Yours no longer,

"Norah Cannington."

Miss Pluff kept her room till after Sir Reginald's body had been laid in the ground, then she demanded a private interview with his son.

The request astonished him, for he had hoped she would leave quietly without showing her face again, and the idea of talking to her was distasteful to Sefton.

However, he came at her bidding, thinking to save his mother unpleasantness, and intending to request her to leave without bidding Lady Ravenscroft good-bye.

He found Miss Pluff standing in a defiant attitude in the middle of the room, gowned in black, her face strikingly

Sefton bowed his head.

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pale and altered, her hair dressed becomingly, her hands clasped.

She looked straight into his eyes without wavering, advanced a step, then addressed him in a low, determined voice:

"I want to speak to you," she said, "*seriously*, on a very important matter."

Sefton bowed his head. He did not wish her the conventional "Good-morning."

"First of all, let me tell you how deeply I feel with you for the great calamity that has fallen upon this house."

He held up his hand.

"I have no need of sympathy from *you*."

His tone was hard, he had set his face like a flint, and no sign or ordinary courtesy betrayed itself. A faint flush crept into the governess's cheeks.

"Very well," she retorted, drawing herself up. "Perhaps it may surprise you to hear that Sir Reginald had taken me entirely into his confidence. While you were all living on in blissful ignorance, I *knew* that ruin was impending, but my counsel and advice were useless, I could only comfort and console. I have all Sir Reginald's secrets, I know the reason of his suicide, with its accompanying disgrace. Oh! yes, you would hush it up and keep it from the world. You are proud, you Ravenscrofts, but even your high standard must fall beneath the glaring light which *I* could throw on your father's past! Listen," and she glanced round as if the very walls had ears, then stealing to his side, with the strange slouching step that Lady Norah had remarked upon, she whispered something in his ear.

The young baronet started, his face paled, in his excitement he seized her shoulder, and stared down into her eyes. "You know *that!*" he muttered fiercely.

"Yes, and more."

"Then for the sake of the woman you have wronged; whose husband you would have stolen; for the sake of the little girl he loved; in respect for the dead; in pity for the living; never let it pass your lips again."

Miss Pluff's strange face smiled, yet at the same time the expression was so intensely sad, that even Sefton marvelled at it.

"You—you want a bribe?" he asked. "Money?"

She shook her head.

"Oh! no. I have not forgotten the loss of your fortune. But I still remember that the name of Ravenscroft is dear to me—that the blue blood, paupered though it be, runs in your veins. I care not for wealth, but I want position. Give me this as the price of my silence, or, as there is a heaven above, your father's memory shall be disgraced; his name dragged through the mire!"

She spoke vehemently; the fires of Hell seemed alight in her eyes, the gaunt form swayed and quivered, while her hands clung to Sefton's arms, as a vampire clutching its victim.

"What do you mean?" he gasped, too thunderstruck to push her from him.

"*Mean!*" she laughed wildly; "that I demand marriage with you, Sir Sefton, that you will have to make *me* Lady Ravenscroft to save the family honour!"

He gazed at her like one demented—the power of speech fled. Her long fingers were still seizing his sleeve.

"See," she whispered, "that will explain all. Who will question my despair at witnessing the shocking scene of my lover's father, shot dead in his own grounds. Was it not natural, that being hysterical, I lost my head, and mingled my grief with his?"

As Sefton listened, he sifted the complicated situation in his mind with sudden, calm deliberation. The honour of the Ravenscrofts lay in the hands of Georgina Pluff. A great, a tremendous, sacrifice on his part alone could save it. His life was nothing to him now, but the name was everything. Norah had given him up, she cared no longer. His love had been heedlessly cast aside, henceforth all natural affection in him was dead, except the love he bore his mother. To save her husband's memory from a slur, to obey his father's last command, surely this must bring some faint compensation, some atom of relief to his over-wrought and strained senses. Besides which, pique crept in, the

"Have you nothing more to say?"

thought of the false and heartless Lady Norah. Why should *she* guess his sufferings?

He turned to the woman, and glanced at her weird, magnetic smile. It filled his soul with repugnance.

"Is there no other way?"

"None. Your wife, or your enemy? Which is it to be?"

"Give me time to consider."

"*This* is the time," she answered. "Leave me without your promise, and I go from your house to-day, this very hour, and Sir Reginald's secrets go with me. The society papers are always glad of information regarding the blue blood of England. Make me one of yourselves, and I will guard your family secrets as my own life. Sefton, you cannot refuse!"

A terrible crisis was at hand. The man was young, and sorely tried, shaken by recent storms, reckless and bewildered.

The necessity for this sacrifice came almost as a relief. He heaved a deep sigh and thrust her from him.

"I promise," he muttered. "You ask a long price—a life-time. Do you realise what it means?"

"Perfectly."

A strange betrothal, truly! The woman trembling and triumphant, the man cold, with a terribly passive expression in his white face, turning away without another word from his newly-affianced wife.

"Have you nothing more to say?" she asked as he reached the door.

He glanced back.

"No."

"Your word is your bond, Sefton. I can trust it."

The Christian name jarred on him from her lips. It seemed impertinent and unnecessary at that moment.

"Yes, you may rely on my promise, Miss Pluff. It is the old story—the sins of the fathers upon the children!"

Then he closed the door softly after him and walked dizzily down the passage.

"I have made a bargain with a female fiend," he muttered. "I have sold myself to the Devil."

This tragic idea appealed to his morbid feelings as he remembered Lady Norah's words: "I have a presentiment about that woman—something evil."

It was Lady Norah who had driven him to destruction; he laid the wreck of his life at her door.

How could he guess at that very moment she, too, prayed for death in the midst of a merry house party at Worboise Manor? When her friends remarked on her depression she merely said: "The Ravenscrofts are in trouble. I knew them so well. I was thinking of that shocking suicide."

One or two whispered that she had broken the son's heart, and was troubled for once by remorse, but no one knew the truth. The world seldom gets to the bottom of anything, and what it sees on the surface is very far from the mark.

"Young Sefton Ravenscroft was one of Norah's latest victims," said a light-hearted girl to a hard-hearted youth; "she numbers him now among the slain. Norah has no *feeling*, and she left off her conscience with pinafores. Yet even then it was a trial to keep it clean."

A red-faced man was . . . talking loudly to a meek-looking gardener.

But what of Miss Pluff in her hour of victory, left as she was, mistress of the situation?

She stood listening to Sefton's retreating footsteps like a creature turned to stone, though a thousand thoughts darted through her brain. Was it possible that she had ever loved? Could this pitiless erring woman have cherished a tender affection, remembered a good day in the dark years that were gone? Once as a little child she recollected vaguely that someone had been kind, a dying man on a bed, she called him "father." He kissed her, and held her to his heart, whispering: "Be good, Georgie." Just three words that meant to her then "don't get into bad tempers, and scratch your nurse."

Then came a long and loveless blank till the passionate devotion for Sir Reginald had poisoned all that was pure in her nature, and cast her back upon the world raging against cruel crushing fate.

Now the current changed again into swift exciting waters. *She* was to be Lady Ravenscroft, one of a select circle, nearly related to some of the highest families, and pose as the sweet young wife who had taken pity on Sir Sefton in his poverty. Visions of the great people who would receive her, the grand houses at which she would visit stirred her blood.

These bracing fancies brought back the warm flow of life to her veins.

She looked only on the side that pleased her imagination.

Georgina Pluff had no fear, she would desecrate her womanhood without a sigh, violate sacred matrimony, and holy motherhood.

She neither flinched nor wavered as she turned over in her mind the recent scene with the man she had claimed for her husband.

"Would he grow in time to regard her tenderly?" she asked herself. "Could the kiss of emotion ever pass from his lips to hers?"

Candidly she confessed that it was not only unlikely, but, under the circumstances, practically impossible.

"Henceforth, good-bye, romance," cried Georgina, dashing a burning tear from her eye, and laughing harshly.

She sank into a low chair, rested her elbows on her knees, and pressed her sharp chin upon her knuckles.

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"Lady Ravenscroft, Georgina, that is your future name and title! He is yours! You have played your cards well."

"*Sefton Ravenscroft to Georgina Pluff.*" She fancied she read the announcement in the Times. It sent a wave of joy through her system, a smile to her narrow lips.

CHAPTER V.

The New Lady Ravenscroft.

A red-faced man was standing by a flower-bed, pointing with a thick stick, and talking loudly to a meek-looking gardener.

"What's the good," he thundered, "of keeping four of you chaps loafing round this garden, if you can't so much as *weed*? You don't think I'm going to pay you to play, do you? No doubt it's very nice sitting and smoking in the arbour, but I've got six acres of ground round my house, you'll be pleased to remember, and there are plenty of men out of employment in Clapham, who would be glad to step into your shoes."

Having delivered this tirade, he struck the offending weeds with his stick, and turned away towards the house.

John Pluff was a retired grocer; he gave up a thriving business in Sydenham, when his father, an old miner, died and left him an unexpected fortune.

A widower and childless, he settled down in a large house at Clapham, and was on the look-out for a second wife.

He had no relations except a half-starved nephew, whom he refused to help, for having committed the dire offence of marrying a penniless street singer at the age of seventeen, and Georgina, the child of his cousin, Gabriel Pluff, an orphan, earning her living as a governess.

Georgina had always hated John Pluff's vulgarity. The grocer's shop stuck in her throat—she could not gulp it down. Besides, she felt that he despised her for her poverty and had no pity for her orphanhood. They never corresponded, and it was with intense surprise that he had opened a letter announcing her engagement to Sir Sefton Ravenscroft.

The news swelled his heart with vaulting pride, his eyes rolled in their fat rims, he smacked his knee with his broad palm. Snobbish visions floated through John Pluff's uneducated brain. He heard himself saying to his friends in trade: "My cousin, Lady Ravenscroft," watching for the effect of the words exultantly. She should be his dear, adopted daughter, his favourite little Georgie! So he wrote a long effusion, giving her an open invitation to come to Queen's Gate House, his residence at Clapham, and asking her what gift would be most acceptable in her new position. Georgina promptly replied, "a cheque," and John Pluff instantly forwarded £1,000 for "my lady's trousseau."

He was thinking of Georgina as he stumped round his six acres and grumbled at the gardeners.

A hansom cab drove through the gates. He watched it with a sense of irritation.

"I know it's that pushing widow, Mrs. Pilpack, again," he muttered to himself. "She has an eye to my money-bags, the ugly old hag. If I marry, it will be youth and beauty my coin shall purchase, not dyed locks and painted lips."

A servant in livery came hurrying across the lawn.

"Well, well. Who's after me now?" asked Mr. Pluff irritably, having caught sight of a skirt passing through the doorway.

"Lady Ravenscroft, sir."

"*Lady Ravenscroft!*"

His eyes dilated, then rubbing his hands together and chuckling, he strutted across the lawn.

"I hope you showed her into my largest drawing-room," he said, as the servant followed him.

"Yes, sir."

"My dearest Georgina!" cried Mr. Pluff, kissing the new Lady Ravenscroft on both cheeks, "at last I hold you in my arms, my sweet, beautiful girl!"

She freed herself from his embrace, and smiled faintly.

"How is it you never asked your devoted old cousin to the wedding? Eh, Georgie?" chucking her under the chin.

"Simply because we were married at a registry office, discarding ceremony and pomp. My husband and his family have not yet fully recovered from the shock of poor Sir Reginald's death, though, of course, their grief cannot last for ever, and," with rather a strained laugh, "we are cheering up!"

"Well, I congratulate you. Who would have thought you'd have been booked by a baronet? A clever girl, as sharp as they make 'em. You must give me your 'usband's pedigree. I want to learn it off by heart. It's something to be related to the aristocracy, and not to be despised. It gives you a standing in Society. But you look pinched and pale, Georgina. Here, Edward, bring my lady a glass of wine."

"No, thanks, Cousin John, tea, if you don't mind, and then when there are no servants within earshot, I should be glad of a little quiet conversation with you on family matters."

"My dearest Georgina!"

Mr. Pluff drew his chair forward, and surveyed her approvingly.

"That's a very 'andsome gown!" he said. "Georgina, your figure's improved."

"I have to thank you for a decent trousseau, and a nice little sum of money in hand," she replied; "your cheque was a Godsend."

"Don't mention it, my dear. I thought a 'thou' might come in handy, and it's nothing to me," with an airy wave of his hand, and a widening of his chest. "Now here's a cup of the finest brew you could get in the country. Drink it down 'ot, and see if you don't feel twice as fit in a jiffy."

Georgina obeyed. His vulgarity was appalling, but she thought of his fortune, and murmured a compliment on the tea.

"Of course, as you know, *I* always have everything of the best."

He folded his hands, and ran through the wines in his cellar—their merit and price. "I bought up all Lord D——'s old port after his death. He left his widow a pauper, and she's in one of them Royal workhouses. That is the worst of some of these ancient families, they are as poor as Church mice, and as proud as peacocks."

"No wonder," put in Lady Ravenscroft, "they have their blue blood."

"Yes, and hard cash won't buy *that*," he replied solemnly. "But I never thought I should see a 'Pluff' with an 'andle to her name. But come, you were going to talk over your private affairs."

Georgina replaced her cup on the silver tray, and drew down her veil again.

"I suppose you know that the Ravenscrofts lost the greater bulk of their fortune at Sir Reginald's death."

"Yes, I gathered as much from the papers."

"I could not bear for Sefton to part with the old family

place, such a noble house, with miles of land, an estate that has been handed down from generation to generation from time immemorial. So sooner than put Ravenscroft Park on the market, we decided to retrench, and scrape along as best we could on his small income. Already I am beginning to see the folly of being over-housed and under-servanted, the misery of beholding the beautiful grounds ill-kept, the loneliness of rooms uninhabited. The grass is let out, except just what my husband requires for his animals. Poor boy! He is trying to make a little extra money by training young horses, breaking them in himself, and selling them at a profit. He is the most reckless rider imaginable. I always expect to hear he has broken his neck."

He placed his bulgy form beside her.

"Dear!, *dear!*" ejaculated Mr. Pluff.

"Oh! my life is not all a bed of roses. I have countless anxieties. Probably, if we could bring ourselves to live in a small house, in some quiet unostentatious suburb, we should be happier in the long run. But Ravenscroft in its beauty and dignity shall rot and decay before my eyes, its ancestral towers fall about my head, sooner than pass into alien hands, to parvenu purchasers."

She rose with a tragic gesture that impressed John Pluff deeply.

"I *can't* give it up," she continued. "I *must* cling to it, keep it, for Sefton's heir. Think, Cousin John, if a son should ever crown our married bliss, what it would mean to him—the future baronet—to find that his estates had been sold, his rightful inheritance given up to others."

The retired grocer warmed to the subject, catching Georgina's enthusiasm.

"Stick to the old place like gum, my girl. You've caught the true spirit of the aristocrat, and if you ever let Ravenscroft Park slip through your fingers, well, you won't be a Pluff. We have no blue blood in our veins, worse luck, still we've noble instincts to appreciate it, and we hang on to a good thing when we have it."

"Besides," continued Georgina warily, "fortunes change, and Sefton has so many rich relations who any day might leave him a legacy."

She looked shyly under her eyelashes at "Cousin John."

"Well, if you come to wealthy relations, guess you are as well off in that respect as Sir Sefton."

"Yes, indeed. I often boast of you to my husband."

"No, now, do you really?" with a bland smile. "And what about your ma-in-law? Do she cotton to you?"

"Oh! the Dowager Lady Ravenscroft is a very charming woman, but just a little jealous of me I fancy, resents her son's affection straying from herself. She lives in town on her own income with her daughter. She would dearly have loved to keep poor Sefton tied to the strings of her widow's cap. I must say he is a very devoted son, and visits her constantly. At present she does not come to Ravenscroft Park, as the associations are so painful. Her husband's suicide was a shock from which I fear she will never really recover."

"You don't say! Poor creature! I suppose she won't be looking out for a second, eh? A rich man who could set her on her feet again. Ah! no," catching sight of Georgina's horrified expression, "it would not do for two of the Pluffs to marry into the same family."

"Cousin John, you—you don't contemplate a second union?"

She asked the question anxiously.

"Well, and why not? I'm a hale, healthy man, with plenty of 'oof' to back me up. There's many a fine lass that would look upon me favourably."

"Ah! I see you are unselfish, you would share your wealth with another, some young extravagant beauty, who will squander it right and left, and marry you simply for what you can give her."

A pang of fear shot through John Pluff's soul. Her words had a ring of truth in them. He fidgeted in his blue satin chair.

"Perhaps you are right. I shan't decide in a hurry. I've only to say the word to get a dozen of 'em."

"Yes. I should be sorry to see you caught by a designing fortune-hunter."

Georgina rose.

"I must return," she said, "for Sefton is to meet me by the six o'clock train. He is spending an hour or so with his mother. Perhaps you would drive me to Waterloo. I should like to see your carriage and pair."

Mr. Pluff rang the bell. "Certainly, but I trust next time you will bring your luggage, and do me the honour to stay. I shall be proud and 'appy to entertain the pair of you. There's not a house in Europe where you will be better waited on. For comfort and good living my establishment can't be beaten, and you can tell your husband so. By-the-way, Georgie, my love, I'd like to have a look at the old ancestral mansion, though it is running to seed. I won't put you to any inconvenience, nor shall my visit cause you any expense. You are not above receiving a little present from Cousin John, I'm sure. He hasn't too many relations to spend his money on. Of course, when it comes to friends, well, they swarms like a lot of bees. But it don't do to be too generous to outsiders, for you never know when you are being taken in."

Georgina nodded.

"Very true," she declared. "Don't let people sit upon you. Now you are living in affluence, free from the atmosphere of shop and trade, drop those old acquaintances and leech-like hangers on, who would drain you of your very life blood. A man in your position cannot be too careful."

"Lor', what a wiseacre you've grown! But here are my two classy chestnuts. There's breeding in them, if you like; and that barouche is fit for a queen to ride in."

"But, Cousin John, *why* on earth have you given the men cockades?"

"Thought they looked well. Some folks say it's for the army and navy, but that's just because they are green with envy. Not having carriages themselves, and don't know nothing about it. Mr. Clay, the chemist at Sydenham, he calls me 'the Colonel.' There, step in, Georgina, and see if it is not the easiest seat you have ever fitted your back into."

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Lady Ravenscroft's heart sank. This was the man who had invited himself to Ravenscroft Park, the only relation she had to produce, a necessary incumbrance if she was to make him her banker.

He placed his bulgy form beside her, and the horses dashed away.

CHAPTER VI.

"I WANT YOU, SEFTON."

LADY RAVENSCROFT steadied herself against a gate, and placed her hand over her eyes.

"I can't bear to watch," she said. "Sefton is very cruel to cause me such terror and anxiety. He has absolutely no consideration for his wife or his life. That horse killed two grooms in Will Thompson's stables before he let Sefton have it."

The Hon. Douglas Shirling reassured Lady Ravenscroft, declaring that her husband had the mare thoroughly in hand, and that once he taught it manners, the beast would fetch a long price.

Nevertheless, he followed the rider's every movement with anything but a happy expression on his face.

Surely, he thought, Sefton must be mad to ride an untamed animal in the park—a bolt under the trees would mean certain death.

Douglas Shirling was one of the few friends Sir Sefton asked to the house since his marriage with Georgina Pluff. The men were the same age, and had been at College together.

Douglas was the only person outside his family to whom, in old days, he confided his secret engagement to Lady Norah. Douglas knew the Cannington's well, and had promised to be Sefton's best man.

Of course he guessed that Lady Norah proved fickle, and the governess, doubtless through sympathy, had caught the young baronet's heart in the rebound. Yet he instinctively disliked the new Lady Ravenscroft, and wondered that Sefton had allowed himself to be entrapped by her.

"His recklessness is positively suicidal," said Georgina, turning away. "But I'm tired of talking. Sefton never pays any heed to my wishes."

"Are you going in?"

"Yes. What is the good of standing here with my heart in my mouth? If Sefton is to be thrown, I would rather not see."

She walked slowly towards the house, vexed with Douglas Shirling for not following her.

He remained leaning on the gate, till Sefton rejoined him, pale with heat.

"What's the sense of risking your life?" said his friend, as they strolled through the grounds together. "It hardly seems worth it! I would ride anything within reason, but that mare will need a bit of breaking before you've done with her. I declare once or twice I thought she had got the better of you."

"Come into my study and have a smoke," said Sefton, passing through a long French window, and flinging himself into the chair in which his father sat the night before he died, contemplating the dread unknown. This room was so strongly associated with Reginald Ravenscroft, that Georgina never entered it without a shiver.

"Perhaps," said Sefton, his eyes wandering round the familiar walls, "the suicidal mania is in our family."

Douglas eyed him critically. He noticed the restless flash in his friend's eye, the drawn lines round his mouth, that should not have been there.

Sefton was wretched with his wife—anyone could see that!

"Don't let yourself get morbid," advised Mr. Shirling, forcing a laugh.

"Morbid! That's hardly the word, old chap. Morbid temperaments are often the happiest, *they* glory in their sorrows, and feast upon them with pleasurable relish. It is not my father's death I dwell upon. I do not revel in pointing out the spot on which he shot himself, nor plague my acquaintances with details of that horrible never-to-be-forgotten night. I want to put it all away from my mind. Believe me, the living sorrows, the daily, hourly regrets, are more haunting and terrible than all the ghosts of the past. When a man is ever face to face with his own madness and folly, the consequences of which go on—on—night and day. Bah! what am I saying?"

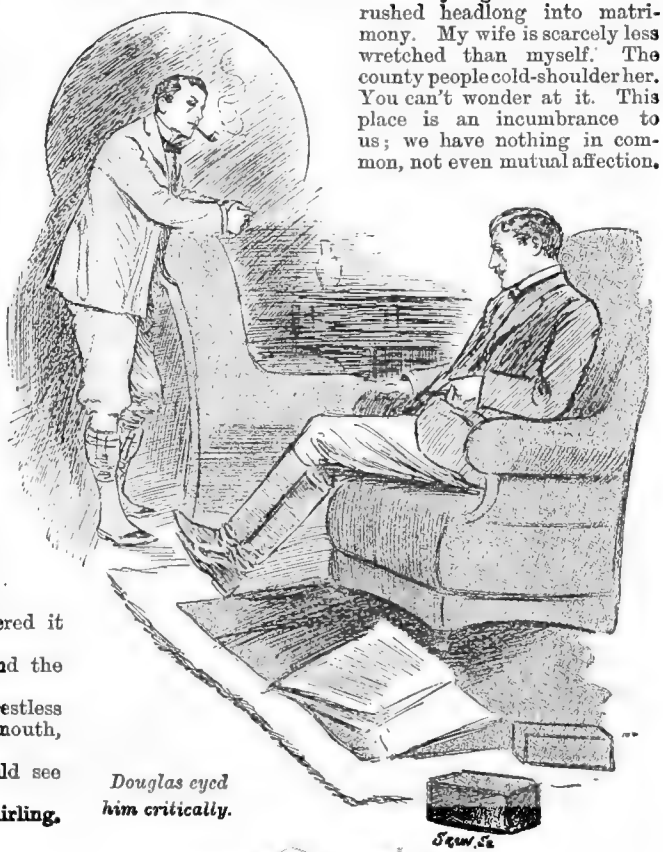
He broke off shortly, the pipe he had lit went out unnoticed between his pale lips, his hands hung limply on each side of the chair, as if dead, impassive and nerveless.

Douglas Shirling was one of those quiet listeners who instinctively inspire confidence. He had never known trouble himself, his life had been a straight rose-path, made easy by wealth, health, and a calm naturally happy nature, moulded in the lap of luxury. Yet he could give sympathy so genuine, so unassuming, that those who had once received it, sought it again and again.

"Oh, don't mind me, old fellow," said Douglas consolingly. "I can see you are in low water. I know you're not happy. I only wish I could do anything to——"

He stopped speaking, amazed at the look of bitter hatred that crossed his friend's face.

"You have guessed it then," said Sefton. "This miserable spun-out existence with a woman I cannot love, nor even respect. Ah, Douglas, I can trust you. I would not breath a word of this to another living soul—it is the secret of my life—a load of humiliation. I am chained down, body and soul. No wonder that danger is welcome—that I crave for death itself. I was not in my right senses when I rushed headlong into matrimony. My wife is scarcely less wretched than myself. The county people cold-shoulder her. You can't wonder at it. This place is an incumbrance to us; we have nothing in common, not even mutual affection.



Douglas eyed him critically.

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Ah, you look surprised. I know what you would ask. Why on earth did I do it? I'm not at liberty to explain. The iron entered into my soul when Norah Cannington went out of my life. I cared for nothing. I was hopeless—desperate! They say she will marry the Duke of Malvern; he is always at Rosemont. A brainless boy, insipid and weak-eyed, prematurely aged by outrageous dissipations, a creature unworthy to tie her shoe lace. It is too revolting to think of!"

She looked unutterably charming, lounging upon a window seat.

"Serve her right," muttered Douglas Shirling. "No fate is bad enough for a woman who wantonly breaks true hearts for a pastime. Lady Norah has absolutely no feeling, she is noted for her heartlessness. Whoever she marries she will wreck. Don't regret her, Sefton. She is not worth a sigh."

"Love clings fast, you cannot tear it out, trample it under foot for the bidding. Though your higher nature may rebel at cleaving to what is false, the lower nature will get the better of it, and kiss the very dust. By-the-way, you must go to the Cannington's, you promised them yesterday on the station."

"Oh! I can't stand the old man, and Lady Norah drives me wild. After the way she treated you, I can hardly bring myself to be civil to her."

"Well, go this afternoon and leave a card. There is a flower show at the Grange, and Lady Cannington is giving away the prizes. They will all be out."

Douglas Shirling caught at the idea.

He finished his smoke and changed the conversation to pleasanter subjects.

Then he whirled away on a machine to Rosemont, with knit brows and resentful thoughts for his friend's shattered career.

Lord and Lady Cannington, he was informed, were out, but Lady Norah was at home, and a moment later he found himself in her presence.

She looked unutterably charming, lounging upon a window seat, scribbling with a silver pencil shaped like an axe, on a sheet of notepaper. Her face was graver than usual, and the smile of welcome she gave Mr. Shirling had a wintry air about it. He fancied the pressure of her hand was more fervent than of yore, and that she paled at sight of him. He noticed a full-length portrait of the Duke of Malvern on Lady Norah's piano in a silver frame. His christian name was written across the corner of the photograph, the thin, straggling fist being characteristic of the man.

"You have shattered my poetic muse," she said, holding up the paper reproachfully. "I was just inspired."

"Penning odes to broken hearts?" he asked, a touch of sarcasm in his tone.

"Yes," looking him straight in the eyes. "How did you know?"

He had not expected this answer, and hesitated before replying lamely:

"Oh! poetry is generally demoralising."

"Do you think so? I consider it is rather elevating to contemplate sorrow, especially if you can put it into verse."

"It is practically impossible," declared Douglas Shirling, "to write of a sensation that you have never experienced. You need a broken heart yourself before you can analyse the sufferings of others."

A strange expression flitted across Norah Cannington's face, quite enigmatical, a puzzle to the man. Her lips parted as if to speak, but she closed them again in silence, and crumpled the writing in her hand.

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She knew instinctively that he disliked her. It is easily discerned, unmistakably felt by sensitive impressionable natures. The knowledge, however, did not displease, though it certainly astonished Lady Norah.

People who are habitually worshipped by those around them, appreciate the novelty of a hostile attitude, it is at once diverting and interesting. Besides this, she knew the reason of Mr. Shirling's changed manner, and admired him for it.

"You are staying at Ravenscroft Park?" she said at last, breaking a rather embarrassing pause. "The place is very altered, don't you think?"

She leant forward as she spoke and raised her eyebrows inquiringly.

"Sefton is very altered, if you mean that," replied the man mercilessly.

"Ah! Sefton—yes," catching her breath, "poor fellow! He has had more than his share of sorrow. The kicks of the world are very hard, and they bruise deeply. I am so sorry for him."

Mr. Shirling stared at her amazed. How dare she *pity* Sefton, and before him too, when she herself had caused the sharpest pain—dealt the most lasting blow. His heart swelled with resentment, he looked up and saw the tears in her eyes. The sight of them softened him, till he remembered they could be but crocodile tears.

"You are right," he answered, "fate has been exceptionally cruel to our friend at Ravenscroft Park. More than one of the kicks you mention came when he was already down."

"I know what you think," said Lady Norah, her eyes suddenly flashing, "that *I* was to blame. It is very natural; perhaps, too, you are right. I like you for your staunch friendship to Sefton—your changed feelings to me. It shows that you have his happiness really at heart—that you are loyal and true. We are alone. I always speak plainly. You know that Sefton and I were all the world to one another. Then can you explain, why, if he loved me, he married that woman whose name was tainted already by scandal—a woman that people receive on sufferance, and to whom his mother can barely bring herself to speak?"

"Because he was mad!" muttered Douglas Shirling. "*You* drove him out of his senses for the time, and in some mysterious way that creature got hold of him. You left him a prey to an adventuress!"

Lady Norah shuddered and covered her face with her hands.

"If it could be undone," she said. "Marriage is so dreadfully final. It seems to end everything. I have such a horror, such a terror of it."

"Because you have never really loved."

"Is that the reason?" lowering her eyes lest he should read the anguish in their depths.

"Undoubtedly."

How little he guessed the bitterness of her soul. The thought of Georgina Pluff revolted her. She was madly jealous, miserably faithful to her old passion. Yet, like a ship driven of strong winds, she felt herself swept on into swift currents and deep channels, her father's strong will over at the helm. Instinctively her eyes wandered to that portrait on the piano—her pictured destiny.

Douglas Shirling made an effort to steer their conversation away from personalities.

"Why are you alone?" he asked. "It is unusual to find you in solitude."

"I stayed in," she answered apathetically, "because I am expecting the Duke of Malvern."

Her visitor rose abruptly. She understood the stiff handshake.

"How long are you staying at Ravenscroft Park?"

"Only a day or two."

"Be good to Sefton."

Then she turned to the window and watched him down the drive.

"Oh, I want you, I want you, Sefton!" she moaned. But the sinister face of Georgina Pluff rose before her vision, and the Duke of Malvern was announced.

(To be continued.)

RESULT of PICTURE PUZZLE COMPETITION,

No. 8.

A LARGE proportion of the attempts in this competition were correct, and the prize has been awarded to Mr. George D. Taylor, 28, Ernest Street, Rhyl, North Wales, whose pictute was considered the neatest. Consolation Prizes have been sent to:

W. H. Dodson, 109, Leith Street, Edinburgh; T. N. Crowle, R.N., 43, Portland Road, Devonport; W. H. Barrett, 73, Tindal Street, Balsall Heath, Birmingham; F. Chapman, 47, Union Place, Stonehouse, Devon; A. N. Ward, The Firs, Essex Road, Enfield; D. Webb, Barnwell Junction, Cambridge; W. Binmore, The Cottage, Lyncombe, Torquay, Devonshire; A. Hodge, 1, Springfield Gardens, Upper Clapton, N.E.; H. W. Tinsley, 46, Rye Lane, Peckham, S.E.; Miss M. Clark, 12, Cloudesdale Road, Balham, S.W.; J. A. Rigg, 14, Newport Road, Manningham, Bradford; A. W. Rowe, New Road, Lower Edmonton; W. J. Spearing, Glenarm House, Shaw, near Oldham; Miss Beddre, 4, Globe Place, Clissold Park, Stoke Newington; R. T. Wall, 54, Burlington Street, Liverpool; J. Baker, 4, Argyle Street, Darwen, Lancashire; F. Grant, 12, Orchard Road, Plumstead, Kent; Mrs. M. Anderson, 4, Back Lane, Frances Street, Woolwich; H. Anderson, Naval Ordnance Office, Royal Arsenal, Woolwich; C. C. Hayter, 3, St. Mark's Terrace, Nichol's Town, Southampton; T. A. Auckland, 11, Mastyn Road, Brixton; S. H. Futt, 56, High Street, Old Brompton, Kent; B. Willman, 114, Eversley Street, Liverpool; Miss E. Olver, Lansdowne Villa, Newton Abbot, South Devon; Mrs. E. Davis, 13, Barbican Terrace, Barnstable, North Devon; G. S. Carlton, 1, Berridge Street, Leicester.

KEY.

35	23	6	37	41	18	69	14
54	2	51	83	8	28	21	40
38	3	16	39	63	68	43	9
71	55	15	32	5	45	18	25
10	48	58	12	1	66	30	67
4	46	57	53	73	34	33	27
70	11	82	24	99	86	20	65
42	52	76	78	62	69	75	17
69	08	22	85	60	72	84	44
59	47	61	19	62	77	88	19
7	97	13	88	18	81	50	74

Google

A FALSE ALARM.

Although a naturally good fellow, Saint-Perix went home in a very bad humour. He had been utterly cleaned out at the club. The worst luck! he had not won once in three hours. At last he threw down the cards and left, vowing that never again would he be found seated at the card table.

Ensconced in a cab, he said to himself, with sullen anger, that all this would never have happened if the Countess had not had a headache—her eternal headache—and they would have gone to the opera together and yawned in company throughout the performance, as they always did on Fridays. Mechanically he thought of the story they had told him of Montescourt one evening at the club. It was almost a farce, what with Montescourt's simplicity, his wife's perpetual indisposition whenever she was called on to accompany her husband to a ball or the theatre, and the handsome young man—like a hero of light opera—who made the third in the *dramatis personæ*.

Could it possibly be that the Countess was playing the same trick on him to be alone and free for an entire evening? Was not that headache a mere pretext. One by one a thousand forgotten details came back to his memory. He recalled that fashionable bazaar for the benefit of the inundated Madagascans, where, having neither rose-buds nor satchet bags to sell, Mme. de Saint-Perix had offered her bare arm to be kissed at twenty-five louis a kiss.

The receipts had been enormous. He remembered the interminable walks she had taken in the country with her cousin Max; a ball where she had danced four waltzes with the same partner; a letter that she had burned, with deep emotion, some days latter.

All these phantoms dazed and excited him.

"Fool that I am!" he burst out at last, "to think of such things. The Countess is an angel in her conduct, and she would never——"

He shrugged his shoulders and did not finish the sentence.

The cab stopped before his house. Saint-Perix entered. The gas was extinguished, the servants had gone to bed. The house was wrapped in silent peace.

"Evidently," said he, "I was not expected home so early." And, lighting a match, he proceeded to his wife's chamber, happy at the thought of surprising her in her sleep.

He crossed the ante-chamber, pushed aside the *portière* of the boudoir, and recoiled, startled, livid, as if he had seen a terrible vision.

He had seen a man in the Countess's apartment—a sort of Romeo, of aristocratic bearing, crisp curling hair, and irreproachably dressed.

"So," muttered the husband, "I was not mistaken."

He approached the man, his hands clenched, menacing, pale with anger.

"Will you inform me what you are doing here, sir, in my house?"

"I have no reply to make," stammered the other.

"Scoundrel! I find you at night in my wife's apartment."

"I can say nothing, sir. If you consider yourself aggrieved, I am at your orders."

He extended to Saint-Perix a card, which fell to the floor, and with the other hand he drew from his pocket an elegant little revolver, and, saluting ceremoniously, he said: "Whenever you choose. The Baron San-Leone, Hotel Bristol. It is too late to prolong this conversation—so farewell, till we meet again." And he hastened from the house without awaiting Saint-Perix's reply.

The latter, stupefied, leant with both hands upon a chair to keep from falling. All seemed red before his eyes. He felt that he would go mad—a terrible sense of desolation seemed to crush him down.

"I shall kill him!" he cried, at length; "as for her, I shall attend to her later."

He picked up his card and hastened to the club to choose his seconds.

"A duel to the death," he told them, "and the sooner the better."

* * * * *

The next afternoon, at four o'clock, the seconds came to give an account of their mission to the unhappy husband.

"We presented ourselves," said one of them, "at the hotel indicated on the card of your Baron San-Leone. He had left by the first train in the morning."

"The coward!" cried Saint-Perix; "I would give a hundred thousand francs to find him again!"

At this moment there was a discreet knock, and the Countess's maid half opened the door.

"Madame begs that monsieur will see her a moment," she said.

"Very well," he replied shortly; "you may go."

Scarcely had he pronounced these curt words when the Countess, her eyes red with weeping, her face pale and drawn, entered the salon.

"Henri, Henri, what is the matter with you to-day," she cried, "that you avoid me and close your door to me?"

"You shall learn presently, madame, since you seem not to know," replied Saint-Perix, in measured tones of bitter irony; "at present, as you see, I am engaged."

"But I must speak with you," she interrupted quickly; "I must speak with you now. Do you know what happened in my boudoir last night?"

"I know only too well, madame."

"What! You know that while I was asleep some one broke open the sandal-wood box in which I keep my diamonds——"

Saint-Perix had risen. He gasped, and seizing the Countess's hand in his own, he repeated anxiously: "Someone broke open your box?"

"Yes, and the robber has left nothing, not even my engagement ring, that I prized so much."

"Gentlemen, all is explained!" cried the Count to his two friends triumphantly; "it is a good lesson—do you think so?—and one which I merited. Our San-Leone was a common thief. Well, so much the better. Your jewels, fortunately, can be replaced."

And the Saint-Perix began a second honeymoon, which was quite as tender as the first.

Le Vier.

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The Knife with the Death's-head Handle.

"HULLO, AMIGO! I was looking for you. I want to borrow your knife. My own I have lost, and to-night I lay for the big buck at the spring. Without a knife, how shall I cut his throat, eh?"

Marston carelessly drew his knife from its sheath and handed it to the speaker. "*Si, con gusto*, Vincente," he said, and he resumed his pipe.

Vincente Mariano grasped the weapon almost eagerly. Had Marston not been absorbed in serious thought he would have observed beneath the friendly smile on the Mexican's face an expression of satisfaction hardly called for by so simple an act of generosity as the lending of a knife.

"*Gracias*, señor, the liver shall be yours for breakfast," and, turning from the light of the log fire, Mariano, with his rifle over his shoulder and Marston's knife in his belt, disappeared in the darkness.

Marston continued his ruminations by the fire. It was early yet, but the little Indian village had quieted down, and, save an occasional form stalking along the single, straggling street, he was alone. He had scarcely noticed the coming or the departure of the Mexican, and had passed the knife to him almost mechanically. Now, however, as his thoughts recurred to the incident, a frown settled upon his brow. Then he whistled quietly and finally laughed, but it was a laugh devoid of merriment. "Fudge," he ejaculated, "there's nothing in it; still——" And his mind ran back over the strange story that had been told him by his friends, the gunsmith, in the little shop down at Prescott the day he was first attracted by the long, keen blade of the weapon, its artistically fashioned buck-horn handle, and, above all, by the carved death's head that decorated it. "Grim fancy, that," he had remarked to the gunsmith.

"That is what I thought," was the reply, "when I saw the fiendish thing put on there. This knife was brought into my shop ten years ago by a handsome, dare-devil Spaniard, who had as a wife one of the most attractive women in town. He was a bright chap, and, placing the knife upon the counter, he carved with his penknife this death's head upon the handle. 'My wife shall see it,' he said, with a smile that I did not like, and, gaily waving his hand, he walked out. The next day his wife was found in her bed stabbed to death, and he had disappeared."

"And how did you become possessed of the knife again?"

"Ah, that's too long a story! The day after Francisco Vargas fled, his wife's lover—a Mexican, Mariano, I think was his name—also left town. Three months later, at a fandango hall down at Tucson, while a Spaniard was engaged in the dance, a Mexican, who had entered unperceived, stole behind him, snatched his knife from its sheath, and plunged it into his breast. As he fell, the victim of his own weapon, those near him heard him exclaim: 'Her curse!—she swore I, too—should die—by it. Ah, Mariano!'—and then his life went out. Vargas had a daughter seven or eight years of age—some people said Mariano was really her father—but what became of her nobody seems to know.

"That knife—well, there isn't a vacquero, hunter, miner, or gambler in all Arizona that would wear it at his waist for all the gold in the country. It has had a queer, a diabolical history; but whether the fatality that accompanies it is the result of a frenzied and dying woman's curse—some fearful potency that inheres in that leering symbol of death, projected there by the fiend that lived in the heart of Francisco Vargas, or merely a curious combination of circumstances, such as often makes the truth more wonderful than the wildest fiction, I shall not endeavour to say. After Vargas's death, a gambler got possession of the knife, and, in an affray one night, as he reached with it in his hand to strike an antagonist, he slipped and fell and thrust the blade into his own heart. It passed into the hands of a miner; he was found one morning in his cabin dead, with a huge gash in his breast. His partner, his gold, and his knife had disappeared. Months later the partner, while resisting arrest for another crime, over in Idaho, having emptied his revolver, and being cornered and desperately pressed, avoided the gallows by thrusting the knife's keen blade between his own ribs. Since then it has had half-a-dozen or more owners, and everyone has come to his death in some strange way through its instrumentality. The last one to handle it was the coroner here, into whose hands it came after holding an inquest upon the

body of its last victim two years ago. He would not keep it, it couldn't be given away, and he finally forced it back on me. But I don't own it, you mind, any more than he did. It belongs to nobody. I am not superstitious, and I have no fears; still, I sometimes dread the infernal thing; it does seem as if within that grinning skull there lurked a relentless and implicable demon."

"Good!" said Marston; "your story is interesting Let's see the belt."

Taking it, he buckled it on, and placed the knife in the well-worn sheath. "I am about to start on one of my periodical hunting and prospecting trips. I shall go alone, as I always do. I came in here to purchase a knife and to say *adios*. This is just the thing," and before the little gunsmith could remonstrate—before, with pale face, and hand that trembled, he could reach across the counter in earnest protest, Marston had thrown down a gold piece and was gone.

Just why Marston had wandered off up into the Suppai country, he could not tell; but he did know that he had already been there a few weeks too long. After several weeks of leisurely roughing it he found himself one day on Cataract Creek, among the small tribe of Suppai Indians who occupy that almost inaccessible section. They took to him kindly, for Marston was one of those strong, strapping, broad-shouldered, broad-natured men, a thorough Englishman whose strength, cheerfulness, and kindliness appeal magnetically to all classes of men and to all classes of women.

Marston smoked and meditated. Day after day he had mentally sworn that he would get out of there, and at once. And day after day, and night after night, he had remained.

But the next morning he would "strike out"—bright and early, too. There were unfriendly signs in the air; at least he imagined he saw them. He seemed, somehow, to be an object of suspicion of late. A few of the young bucks kept away from him; their demeanour was sullen and threatening.

He arose, kicked the remaining brands together, and walked towards the small brush shanty that served him as a sleeping place, some distance behind the village. The night air was sweet with the odours of tree, and shrub, and herb, and throwing back his shoulders he filled his lungs with it and rejoiced. Life—life beneath the open sky, companioned by mountain, and forest, and stream—life, with the large liberty and continuous delights that one finds in perfection only in the wide and sunny West—how good, he thought, it all was; with his health, his strength, his freedom, his love for all things, he felt like a god, whose subjects were the rocks, and the trees, and the running waters, and all wild creatures of the wood and of the air. He paused before the shanty. "And yet," he reflected, "what would it all be worth, but for some sort of human companionship!" Putting aside the blanket that served to cover the doorway, he entered and dropped it behind him.

* * * * *

There was a commotion in the village the following morning, and as the sun rose steadily higher the hubbub correspondingly increased. Maria, the belle of the Suppai, whose perfect Spanish features distinguished her from the other girls of the reservation was missing —*La Coqueta*, Vincente Mariano had called her, casting a furtive glance at Marston to see the effect of his words. Marston had not changed countenance. "She is a beauty, Vincente; who was her mother, and how did she come here?"

Mariano shrugged his shoulders. "*Quien sabe!*" he said, and with his habitual imperturbable smile he walked away.

Marston did not appear that morning, either; and finally a group of bucks, some silent and stolid, and some with ugly and menacing looks and gestures, turned as if by a common impulse towards his shanty. At the door they called. There was no reply. Thrusting back the blanket they gazed within. Soon the shanty was filled with and surrounded by a mass of pushing, struggling bucks and squaws, and the cañon resounded with commingled cries of astonishment, rage, and sorrow. Side by side lay Marston and Maria; in the bosom of the girl, thrust to the hilt, was a black-handled knife such as Vincente Mariano always wore in his belt; from the bare and bloody breast of Marston stood up a buck-horn handle on which a death's-head grinned ominously at the young buck whose hand pulled the weapon from its sheath of flesh. But in all that surging, ravening crowd, nowhere was seen the smiling face of Vincente Mariano.

Fred Foster.

JUMBLE STORY COMPETITION.

No. 3.

Four Prizes, one of £2 and three of £1 each, are offered to the competitors who most nearly put together the lines of the story appearing on the opposite page, in their original order. Each line is complete in itself, and the first line is in its correct position, but the title is jumbled up.

Cut out the lines separately, and paste them up in what you consider to be their correct, readable order on one side of the paper, and send the story in an envelope marked "Jumbled Story," to *Short Stories*, Pearson's Buildings, Henrietta Street, London, W.C.

All competitions to be in by Monday, July 20th.

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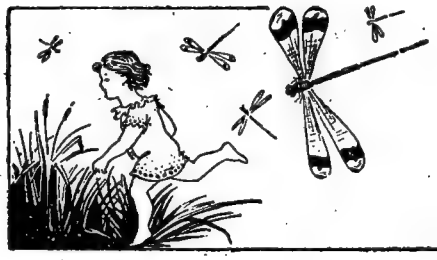

JUMBLE STORY, No. 3.

THE RUSTTED FINDER.

"THE gloomy house at the end of the street is on the golden metal transformed it into a thousand sweet promises to her, saying that when he returned to tell his wife. It would kill her. He knew that she met a companion in misery who was an old friend. The man swore by everything sacred and unsacred that was set on the house, and several facts of interest brought home worn out and fatigued, but invariably with a swollen garden, six yards from the pear tree, beneath a dandelion surrounded by a high wall, and a mystery," the Doctor would never leave her again, and they would be rich and deserted, alone in the gloomy house—what was it that he was doing?

In the first place it was found that there was one young parted with her wedding ring, and then she awaited the worry: she must be very lonely, and yet the busy-bodies discussed, it was observed that behind the fresh beauty of the suburb was fond of saying, and the epigram had but one old dress with which to clothe herself. Lastly she would soon be in want of money. Oh, the bitter irony in finding the big gloomy house, surrounded by the high solemn oath that he would do his commands faithfully. Sentence by sentence, sometimes only one a day he told her; friendless and relationless, she knew of no one to end.

Now it happened that in the exercising yard this man bade her a more tender farewell than usual, he had made piece by piece, until there was none left; all the fine old furniture worth fifty times the amount she got half in gold, amounting to thousands of pounds; he did take a holiday abroad for a year or two. And then he drove his pick savagely into the soil. The dandelion plant, lay buried his hidden treasure, half in notes, and gazed at the gold. "He was to keep the notes for months, and still she was left alone.

There were few, however, who troubled themselves with the agony of the thought; his health broke down; friends' words came back to him, and he remembered of her face there was a tired expression of sadness and mystery, it was nevertheless very evident. So the busy-bodies discussed the matter, with the result that a watch return. But the days passed by and he did not come; to light.

And the husband of this poor woman, starving, and in the eyes, and then one of them was taken back to his City. That meant that he would go away, and return at heads as they went by and passed on. That there was a wall. It was apparently deserted. Not a soul was to about the matter; those that did merely shook their stars. The man ran his fingers through the coins, and banking account.

For the girl who took the lonely little walks by herself to a heavy iron box, and drawing it out, he prised it all times of the day; sometimes he would be absent for the doctors knew that he had but a few months to made the place notorious.

The moon came out from behind a cloud, and shining his secret when the warder's back was turned. In the door lay hundreds upon hundreds of pounds of his ill-cell; and a few hours later found himself free.

The jewels went, one by one, and after those her person in the house at least; and then it was noticed not know how many. The man was to dig it up, and the gloomy house, and yet how deep a mystery, and how pretty. And when she was scanned yet more closely, they would leave their gloomy house, and perhaps would live.

In truth there was a mystery behind the high walls of his shoulders. Then he hurriedly left the garden.

So he went away, and his wife waited anxiously for his drives. He went to the back of the building, scaled the notes back in the box, and the whole in the bag. He did not think of comforting her.

One day, after he had been home all the morning and afternoon, he had taken his hat when it grew dark, and found within everything that his poor friend had broke asunder. and yielded up its treasures. He came whom she might apply for aid. She sold the furniture, and her every detail, from her hat to her shoe, had been happy.

"Fourteen years penal servitude." He had not dared the days lengthened into weeks, and the weeks into days at a time, and even weeks. Then he would come tragic, no one even suspected.

By the last day of his friend's confinement the wretched walls, found the pear tree, and the dandelion plant, and the oath that he had sworn. Then a thought from the suburb his friend had mentioned. He had no difficulty gotten wealth.

He set out immediately in search of the out-of-the-way wife." He was to tell her that her husband was dead.

And he could not let her know. His hair turned white the world that knew his secret; and one, though living, was dead.

Then he looked nervously behind him, and put the clothes. The wind was blowing cold now, and she had listened to their music.

Then gradually she used up all the money he had left open. His heart gave a great bound of excitement as he threw the soil in its place again, and raised the sack to be seen. Only a few sparrows hopped on the overgrown husband had told him everything, and demanded his keep the notes himself, and give the gold to the "little himself, and give the gold to the little wife." His Devil entered his mind;—there were only two people in described. He put the notes hastily on one side, and that she was usually alone, and, what is worse, was very was a young wife, whose husband was something in the of it—the cursed, bitter irony. Within ten paces of her he would do so; the two men looked each other earnestly for it.

The mystery is soon explained—he was in prison.

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LEGENDS OF WOLFVILLE.

BY "DAN QUINN."

Wolfville is a Cattleman's Settlement in Arizona, and the Characters in these Legends are Cowboys.

No. 13.—Needed Watchin' an' Herdin'.

"YES," said the old cattle-man, as he took off his sombrero and gazed meditatively at the rattlesnake band, "cow-punchers are a mighty queer people. They need watchin' an' herdin' as much as cattle.

"I knowed one by the name of Stevenson down on the Turkey Track ranche, in Texas, as merited a heap of lookin' after. This yere Stevenson wasn't exactly onery, but bein' naturally restless an' peevish, with a disposition to be emphatic whenever he was fillin' of himself up, keepin' your eye on him was a good safe play. He was public-sperited, too, if anyone ever was, an' sometimes took lots of pains to please people.

"I minds once when we was bringin' up a beef herd from the Panhandle country. We was up agin' the south bank of the Arkansaw tryin' to throw the herd across. There was a bridge there, but as we allowed it was weak, we was enjoyed in makin' the herd wade.

"Steve was posted at the entrance of the bridge to turn back any loose cattle that might take a notion to try and cross that way. Thar he was, a settin' on his bronco an' both mighty near asleep. Some women people—towerists I reckon—as was camped in town, came over on the bridge to see the fun. They was lined out close up to Steve, an' leanin' of their young Eastern chins on the top rail, a lookin' down.

"'I don't regard this much,' says one young woman, 'there ain't no thrill into it. Why ever don't they do somethin' excitin'?'

"Steve sees the young woman is displeased, an' as he couldn't figger nuthin' else out quick to entertain her he gives a whoop, bangs his six-shooter off into the scenery, digs his spurs into the hoss, an' hops over the side of the bridge into the shallow water below.

"The jump I reckon was some twenty feet an' busted the pony's legs like toothpicks, besides breakin' Steve's collar-bone, an' dispersin' of his features around mighty free an' frightful on account of his sorter lightin' rather heavy on his face.

"Well, we shot the pony, an' Steve rode in the grub waggon four or five days recooperatin' of himself.

"Steve got himself killed a year after, an' struck out on the big trail where the hoof prints all p'ints one way. He was over an upper Red River a-gamblin' around with the cowboys when he got creased.

"Steve never oughter gambled none. He was a good cowboy—splended round-up hand—an' could do his day's work with rope or iron in a brandin' pen with anybody; but comin' right to the case, he didn't know any more about playin' poker than about preachin'.

"Actually he'd bet two pair like there was no record of their bein' beat. This yere, of course, led to frequent poverty, but it didn't seem to teach Steve nuthin'. He was downright foolish on that p'int.

"On the occashun of his demise, one of the boys got hold of a tray-full, Steve bein' possessed of a club flush, queen at the head. That settled it. In two minutes he didn't have even his blankets left.

"After he went broke Steve histed in a drink or two of nose-paint, and scoured around a whole lot, an' just as the tray-full boy gets into his saddle, aimin' to go out to his camp, he comes along up an' hails him.

"'Do you know,' says Steve, mighty gloomy, 'I've been tryin' to school myself to bear it, but I can't, an' I'm therefore here to say as how you stole that pair of kings as you made out your full hand an' completed my ruin. This bein' troo, I'm just goin' to draw on you for that *bric-à-brac* I lost, an' I looks to see you honour the draft unmurmuringly.'

"'Oh, you do, do you?' says the tray-full boy, mighty scornful. 'Well, you're a heap too sanguine. You just send the draft through the clearin' house an' watch it get thrown out a whole lot. Do you suppose I gives up the froots of a tray-full—as hard a hand to hold as that is? Well I guess not; not this round-up.'

"'Don't get flippant about this yere robbery,' says Steve. 'It's enuf to be plundered without bein' pestered with ill-timed gaiety. Now, what I say is this: either I gets my stuff back, right here now, or our succeedin' conversation will occur in the smoke,' an' thereupon Steve pulls his pistol and takes hold of the tray-full boy's hoss by the bridle.

"'If anything makes me more weary than another,' says the tray-full boy, 'it's gun play, an' to avoid such exhibitions I freely returns your plunder, but mark me, you and I don't play cards no more.'

"So the boy gets down off his hoss, an' Steve, thinkin' the debate is closed, puts up his gun again. But he was a heap too hopeful, for the next second, bang goes the tray-full boy's six-shooter, and the bullet ketches Steve in the neck. It bothered his breathin' to such an extent that in two minutes he quit tryin' altogether, an' that afternoon we had a hasty but mighty successful funeral with his remainder.

"'I don't reckon,' says Gene Watkins, who was ranch boss, 'there's no need of havin' any trials or lawsuits about this yere killin'. I've knowed Steve for a long time an' liked him, but them views he kept entertainin' as to the value of poker hands leads straight to everlastin' life, an' this yere sorrowful episode don't surprise nor stampede me none whatever. His death should be a warnin' to us.'"

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By John K. Leys, *author of "The Tenth of June," etc., etc.*

CHAPTER XXIV.

Mr. Daunt is Still Puzzled.

Kenyon did not think it necessary to inform the authorities at Scotland Yard that Vere had been found. They were certain to become acquainted with the fact before long, since the proceedings at Deptford must reach their ears; and in the meantime it was of the utmost importance that the invalid should be allowed to remain quietly in the doctor's hands. Vere was indeed little better than a wreck. He was a different creature from the bright-eyed, high-spirited young man who had won Winnie Denvers' heart.

It was quite impossible for him to go to Devonshire, even if the Rector had been willing to admit him to his house. But Harold had written a long letter to Katherine Dale, explaining in detail the plot against Vere, and the state in which he had found him. After describing the way in which the artist had been drugged and carried off by Jane Unwin to her father's house, he went on:

"It may seem well nigh incredible to you that a man should have been kept prisoner for several weeks in an ordinary house in such a country as ours. But you must remember that, in all probability, for the greater part of the time, he did not care to escape. When he awoke from his stupor on Wednesday morning, his captor would probably give him another dose of the drug; and by Thursday morning she would allow him to realise that it was too late—that the morning which should have secured his life's happiness had come and had found him unable to take the prize he had won. I can imagine him sinking into a deeper and ever deeper apathy, finding his only recreation in the society of Jane Unwin (who, we must remember, had at one time been his sweetheart), and flying every night to opium to deaden his mental pain.

"I can understand all that easily enough; but what I find it hard to comprehend, is how Miss Unwin should have possessed the cunning, the courage, and resolution to carry out a plot of this kind. Assuming, as I think we may fairly assume, that she was madly jealous of Miss Denvers, and keenly desirous of marrying Launcelot Vere, she took a very good way, perhaps the only possible way, of accomplishing her purpose. But is it conceivable that alone and unaided she compelled or induced, not only her father and cousin, but the lawyer, Beaumont, to aid her in the carrying out of her plans? It seems to me that she must either have had a powerful friend to assist her, or she must have been used as a tool by one who desired that Vere should be suppressed, at all events for a time.

"I have one request to make of you before I close. It may appear to you singular, but, believe me, it is not unwarranted. It is that you should not breathe a syllable concerning Vere's release to anyone except Miss Denvers—not even to her father, or to Mr. Shenstone—and that you should impose the same condition on Miss Denvers herself. It will be quite sufficient reason to give her that if the fact of his being found were known to the police they would speedily discover his address, and that it would be a dreadful thing for him to answer the charge of murder (of which I am certain he is wholly innocent) in his present state of health. At any rate, please tell Miss Denvers that I rely absolutely on her discretion, and on your own, to preserve perfect silence on this subject, even from your own nearest relations."

Harold's real reason for insisting that the fact of Vere's having been found should be kept a close secret was that he did not wish Paul Shenstone to hear of it. He thought that his best chance of discovering why Shenstone had played him false, was to allow him to remain in ignorance of what had happened, and see whether he would not in some way betray himself.

Ralph Masters had been taken before the magistrates and remanded for a week. At the expiration of the seven days it would be necessary for Vere to appear at the Deptford Police Court; and then he must be ready, Kenyon knew, to surrender himself, and be taken into custody on the coroner's warrant.

But to Harold's surprise the Deptford police made no effort to arrest Vere, and seemed ignorant of the fact that the coroner's jury had found a verdict against him. The two friends gave evidence against Masters, who was committed for trial on a charge of conspiracy and false imprisonment; and they returned to London in company.

The only reason Harold now had for remaining in town was that he might stay with Vere, and help him to break off the fatal habit of taking opium. But he did not feel certain whether it would not be better for Vere to go to a police office and voluntarily surrender himself; and to set his mind at rest he took Vere one day to call on Mr. Daunt.

"Quite unnecessary," said the lawyer, when the question was submitted to him. "The police have your address?" he added, turning to Vere.

"I am staying with my friend Kenyon at present," he said; "they know that; and they also have my permanent address," was the reply.

Mr. Daunt fixed his steady blue eyes on the sensitive face before him. "A kindly, gentle soul, but weak as water," was his inward comment.

"I believe the police are convinced, as they must be by the facts proved in Masters' case, that you are entirely guiltless of causing poor Jane Unwin's death," said Mr. Daunt. "They probably suspect Masters, or some one else, of the crime; and although you must take your trial, it will be only a formal affair.

"There are one or two points, however, that should be explained. The revolver, now—can you offer any explanation of the fact that your revolver was found close to Jane Unwin's body?"

"As I have told Kenyon," answered Vere, "I lost that revolver, or mislaid it."

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"When did you see it last?"

"At Mr. Pascoe's house in Richmond. It was there I lost it. I had picked up the thing at a pawnbroker's on purpose to use it in a picture of an American girl defending her wounded lover, or something of that sort. Miss Unwin sat for the American girl, and I painted the picture at Mr. Pascoe's house. The case I left behind in my rooms, because it took up so much room in my portmanteau. Mrs. Unwin objected to seeing the revolver lying about the studio, though I told her I never had had a single cartridge for it, so I put it somewhere out of sight—into a cupboard, I think. But when I looked for it, just before leaving, I could not find it. I never saw it again, and I have scarcely even thought of it till Kenyon told me it had been found close to Jane Unwin's body."

Mr. Daunt turned to Kenyon, a grave look on his face.

"The doctor must have been mistaken in saying that the girl could not have committed suicide," he said. "It seems clear that Jane Unwin must have appropriated the revolver and afterwards used it to take her own life."

"It does," said Kenyon.

"Were you in any way related to Mr. Pascoe?" asked Mr. Daunt suddenly of Launcelot.

"Not at all."

"Are you sure?"

"As sure as a man can be of a thing of that sort," replied Vere; and he rose to take leave.

"Could you spare your friend for a minute or two?" said Mr. Daunt to him, as he shook hands. Vere answered that he would wait in the clerk's office, and left the room.

As soon as the door had closed behind him, the lawyer drew his chair closer to Harold's.

"Have you any idea how Jane Unwin came by her death?" he asked.

"Not the slightest."

"Doesn't it strike you as singular that a young woman alone and unaided, should have been able to conceive and carry out such a plot?"

"I don't believe she did it alone, or unaided. I believe she was made a tool by some one," answered Kenyon.

"By whom?"

"Ah! How can I tell?"

"If your friend had been a relation of old Mr Pascoe, I could have guessed at a motive readily enough."

"Yes. But there was no attempt to kill him."

"He would have killed himself soon enough with opium."

"Still, *they* couldn't have reckoned on that," objected Kenyon.

"True—but perhaps a temporary seclusion—long enough to enable some one else to put his hands on Mr. Pascoe's money—would have been sufficient. The trust funds once distributed——"

"The money is still in the hands of the trustees, then?"

"So I was told when I made inquiries a few days ago. It would have been divided among the claimants—children of a second cousin named Patey, I believe—before now; but the trustees received a letter protesting that more time should be given for some nearer relations to turn up. And who do you think wrote that letter?"

"Haven't an idea."

"The disinherited nephew, Joseph Abbot!"

"But what had he to do with it? I thought you told me that he was expressly excluded from sharing in the inheritance?"

"So I did."

"Under no circumstances could he take anything?"

"Not a penny."

"Then why should he trouble himself in the matter?"

"Why, indeed?"

"It is impossible," said Kenyon after a pause, "that any claimant of the Pascoe property could have been at the bottom of this plot against Vere, seeing that he was merely a friend, not a blood relation, of the testator."

"Just so. Yet, where to look for his enemy I do not know."

"The thing is a mystery," said Harold, rising from his chair.

"And will be a mystery to the end," answered the lawyer.

CHAPTER XXV.

In Wythecombe Church.

As Launcelot Vere recovered strength, mental and bodily, the desire of going to Wythecombe, and ascertaining for himself what Winnie's feelings towards him were, grew in intensity till he could bear the suspense no longer. Yet he shrank from meeting the Rector. For several days together he never ceased to implore Kenyon to go with him to Wythecombe and explain to the Rector how he had been trapped and caged and kept a prisoner. Harold would have been willing enough to go, but for two considerations. He feared the effect of so severe a strain on his friend's enfeebled intellect; and he was nervously anxious that Kate's wedding-day should have come and gone before he went to Wythecombe.

As the twelfth of the month—the day that had been fixed for Kate's wedding—drew near, Kenyon fell into a deep melancholy. More than ever, now that his self-imposed task was finished, life seemed a flat and barren moor, empty of everything like interest, not worthy of a man's labour, not worth keeping. The loss of Kate made existence a burden to him. In the future he saw a dull series of aimless years. There he forced his thoughts to stop. He did not know what abysses, what crimes, his passion might plunge him into, if he were to allow himself to think of what he was losing. Sometimes he was on the point of rushing off to Wythecombe, to make another appeal to Kate, ere she spoke the words that were to be an eternal barrier between them. Then he remembered his last interview with her, and recognised the fact that he might bruise and wound the girl's heart, but could never turn her from her purpose.

When the morning of the twelfth of October dawned, Harold's rooms were empty. Vere, who was now quite out of the doctor's hands, waited there all day for him in vain. He did not return till late at night, pale and haggard, drenched with rain, and hardly able to speak.

For the next three days Harold remained in a state of apathy. On the evening of the third day Launcelot Vere called on him as usual and began once more to urge him to go with him to Wythecombe.

"All right," said Harold quietly, "we can go to-morrow."

Vere was astonished.

"Will you see the Rector for me?" he asked eagerly. "Will you plead for me? Will you explain how it was that I was unable to free myself? Will you get him to consent to my seeing Winnie?"

"I will," answered Kenyon. "At least, I will do my best for you."

Vere's impatience was so great that nothing would content him but travelling all night, or leaving London by the first train in the morning. Kenyon preferred the latter alternative; so they agreed to meet at Paddington at 5.20.

Kenyon was punctual; but Vere was already at the station when he arrived, looking out for him anxiously.

"I'll take both tickets," said Harold, taking his place at the end of the *queue* at the booking-office window, while Vere went off to secure seats.

Kenyon had got pretty close to the window, when he heard a man asking for a second-class ticket to Wythecombe. The village was so remote, that Harold felt a certain surprise, and moved a little to see whether he should recognise the man who was going to that out-of-the-way corner of Devonshire. He saw a small, common-place looking person, with a pale, quiet, composed countenance, wearing no beard or moustache, but dressed like a

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commercial traveller or a small tradesman. He seemed to observe that Harold was staring at him, for he suddenly lifted his eyes, and Kenyon hastily looked away.

Once or twice during the journey Kenyon noticed the pale-faced stranger, and found himself dully wondering what the traveller's object might be in going from London to an insignificant village two hundred miles away.

When Vere and his companion arrived at their destination, they noticed that the village street was unusually quiet, even for Wythecombe. Not a soul was to be seen. They went on to the Rectory; the roads were deserted. Around the church-porch were a few women and children.

"Upon my word, I believe there is a wedding going on," said Vere, "some villager's, no doubt." A thrill shot through Harold's veins. Could it be that the scene he had so carefully avoided was to be enacted before his eyes—that his ears were to hear the words spoken that were to put him and his love asunder.

"I say," whispered Vere, "I want to see what is going forward; but I am anxious not to be recognised. Let us slip in by the little door in the tower, and get into the gallery." He dragged Kenyon away by the arm as he spoke, and Harold followed, unresisting.

They found the tower-door open; but the door at the foot of the gallery stair was shut and locked. There was nothing for it but to slip into one of the pews.

If Harold had happened to turn his head round for an instant, he would have seen in the pew immediately behind them the quiet looking stranger who had travelled down that morning from London. But he was gazing about him like one under a spell, or like one who had been a hundred years dead, and was trying to understand the new world he had awakened to.

Even now Kenyon hoped that this was some stranger's wedding—not Kate's, surely! How was he to bear it?

The vestry door opened. There was no more room for doubt. Preceding the Rector by a few steps came Katherine and her mother. The bride was clothed in white; but her face was as white as her dress, and her eyes were on the ground.

Harold could hardly help showing how he suffered. He grasped the back of the pew in front of him, and tried to rise and make his escape; but his limbs refused to obey him. He was shivering from head to foot.

As the bride and her mother passed on to the altar rails, the bridegroom, who had been hidden from the two friends by a pillar, stepped forward.

"Good Heavens, Harold!" said Vere in a loud whisper, "it is Joseph Abbot! What is he doing here?"

Harold, looking round at his friend, saw the quiet stranger in the pew behind start, rise up, and bend forward.

He touched Vere with his finger, and said in a low tone:

"I beg pardon, sir, but are you *certain* that the bridegroom is named Joseph Abbot?"

"Of course I am. I know him perfectly well."

Vere had hardly uttered these few words when the stranger left the pew and glided up the aisle.

The Rector, who had uttered the opening words of the service, paused and frowned at him.

"This marriage cannot go on!" The words were spoken in a low voice, but they were heard all over the church.

"What do you mean, sir? Who are you?" asked Mr. Denvers in an angry whisper.

"I am a detective officer from Scotland Yard, and I arrest you, Joseph Abbot, for the murder of Jane Unwin at Hampstead, on the——"

The sentence was never finished.

Shenstone turned on him, his face like the face of a tiger. Kate, seeing it, turned half round, and clutched her mother by the arm. And, with a snarl of rage, like a tiger's, the murderer felled his captor to the ground. Then, with quick, sudden strides, he reached the door of the vestry and disappeared.

A dozen voices uttered an inarticulate cry, a dozen people ran forward to help the fallen man.

"Take him! Follow him! Don't let him escape!" gasped the police officer as soon as he could speak.

But when the bystanders opened the vestry door, they found the room empty. It was evident that the criminal had run down the green lane that skirted the Rectory garden, and had escaped through some coppices and broken ground into a large wood which filled the bottom of the valley. Pursuit was soon begun; but it was not very vigorous. Nine-tenths of the people in the church were women; of the remainder some were unwilling to run down a neighbour on the mere word of a stranger. Others were secretly unwilling to face a desperate man. By the time the police were fetched from Darnport, it was seen that the fugitive might possibly escape arrest.

* * * * *

"How did you find out that this man Shenstone was the murderer?" asked Kenyon of the detective that evening.

"When the police searched the 'Black Swan,'" he replied, "they found in a drawer a letter to Jane Unwin appointing a meeting on Hampstead Heath. It was signed only with the initials J. A.

"The case was put into my hands; and I saw at once that Mr. Vere could not be the murderer, and that 'J. A.' very probably was. I took the letter to Mrs. Unwin; and she told me at once that she recognised the handwriting as that of a Mr. Abbot, her late master's nephew. There was a postmark on the envelope containing the letter—Wythecombe. I came down here; but could hear nothing of a Mr. Abbot. I went back to London and made inquiries in other directions, but meeting with no success, I decided to try Wythecombe again.

"I confess, sir," he continued with a smile, "that when I saw you in Mr. Vere's company at the railway-station, I thought it possible you might be the man I wanted. So I followed you into the church. Then, when I heard Mr. Vere's sudden exclamation, I thought it better to act at once, since it was of the utmost importance to delay the marriage until the truth could be ascertained."

Kenyon turned away, unable to speak.

Some hours before this Launcelot had managed to get a note conveyed to Winnie, telling her that he was waiting in the lane, not far from the garden gate. The instant she read the scrap of paper, Winnie flew to the spot where her lover was waiting, and he caught her to his breast in a whirlwind of joy; then, before a word was spoken, he knelt down and kissed her feet.

"Oh, Winnie!" he cried at last, "can you forgive me?" and he poured out the story of his being kidnapped, and of his subsequently yielding to the demon of opium.

"Forgive you? I have nothing to forgive!" cried the girl, clinging to his breast, and looking up into his face with shining eyes. She led him home; and at the sight of her radiant face her father's stern resolutions and gloomy fears melted away. He received Vere stiffly at first; but as he came to understand how helpless the poor fellow had been, Mr. Denvers felt able to forgive him for—having been so unfortunate.

Leaving the two lovers to themselves, the Rector went out to pay a call at the High Cottage. On his way back he met Harold Kenyon, and brought him back to the Rectory, in order that he might satisfy his curiosity concerning the events of the last few weeks.

They were sitting together in the library, when a servant came in to say that the person engaged by the Rector to pack up Jane Unwin's things and forward them to her mother had finished her task, and that she had brought a book which she had found on Miss Unwin's bookshelf, but which did not apparently belong to her.

Mr. Denvers took the volume in his hand.

"This belongs to the Sunday-school Library," he said,

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"Miss Dale gave it to us. Here is her name in it—Katherine Pascoe Dale."

Kenyon started.

"Did you say *Pascoe*, sir?"

"Yes. *Pascoe*. Wasn't that the name of the old man who was the uncle of that scoundrel Shenstone?"

"It is the same name," answered Harold. "I wonder if she can be a relation of Mr. Pascoe! The name is not a common one. Perhaps Vere can tell me."

Vere, on being applied to, said he thought Miss Dale might be descended from a sister of Mr. Pascoe, who had married and gone to Australia with her husband many years before. And this turned out to be the case. The solicitors to the trustees had advertised for the next of kin of Anna Pascoe, but only in Australian papers, not knowing that the widow and child of Anna Pascoe's only son had come home and settled in the quiet village of Wythecombe.

The motive which Joseph Abbot had had for all his machinations was now clear. He had found a useful ally, years before, in the housekeeper's daughter, who kept him informed of what went on in his uncle's house when he was absent; and when he was disgraced and banished from the house, she secretly sympathised with him, and did her best to serve his interests, corresponding with him privately from time to time.

Shortly after she went to Wythecombe she borrowed a few books from the Parish Library, and happening to observe in one of them the name "Pascoe," she mentioned the fact in one of her letters to Abbot.

Abbot was at that moment well-nigh desperate. The will disinheriting him had been read, and was evidently going to be acted upon. He had nothing in the world but a few pounds; he had no profession, nor any means of earning a livelihood. When he received Jane Unwin's communication he made some inquiries, and soon satisfied himself that Katherine Dale was sole heiress and next of kin to his late uncle. He then conceived the idea of going down to Wythecombe under a strange name, marrying the heiress, and then, in right of his wife, claiming the property which the will prevented his touching.

He paid his court to Katherine Dale so well that he secured her promise; but very soon after this success he was thunderstruck at being told that Launcelot Vere, who had frequently met him at Mr. Pascoe's house, and knew the whole story of his crime and his disgrace, was actually at Wythecombe, and engaged to marry the Rector's daughter.

It was by the merest accident that he did not meet Vere on the street on the day when Jane Unwin met him and spoke to him.

It was certain that the instant Vere found that Abbot, who had been guilty of a bare-faced attempt to win a fortune by forging a will, was passing under the name of Shenstone, and was about to marry his wife's bridesmaid, he would certainly enlighten his bride, and, through her, Kate herself, as to Mr. Shenstone's true name and character. Therefore it became a necessity for Abbot, unless he meant to abandon his hopes, to stop the impending marriage, and keep Vere out of Wythecombe, at all events until his own marriage had been celebrated.

But this seemed a task beyond his power; and after long and fruitless pondering he had given up all hope of gaining Kate and with her his uncle's property, when he happened one evening to come upon Jane Unwin in a lonely part of the road between his own house and the village. She was crying, and after a little trouble Abbot made her tell him the cause of her distress. The same event, Vere's approaching marriage, was to blast the hopes of both of them.

At that moment a plan for averting the danger that threatened him shone out clear and luminous in Abbot's mental vision. It was almost as if Satan himself had inspired his willing servant.

Here was an instrument, Abbot saw, ready to his hand. He easily persuaded Jane that if she followed his directions she would not only prevent Vere from marrying Miss Denvers, but would raise an insurmountable barrier between them, while at the same time she and Vere would be thrown together at a time when he would be grateful for any society, or any sympathy.

Jane, urged forward by her own unruly passion, soon consented to do all that was asked of her; and she suggested her father's house as the place most suitable in all respects for Vere's temporary prison. Beaumont's help was purchased by a promise of a share in the spoils, and the plot was successfully executed.

It turned out, however, that Vere was by no means the passive victim Jane Unwin had expected to find him.

She wrote to Abbot telling him that she was tired of the struggle, and intended to take Vere back to his own quarters on the following day.

Abbot saw that he must act at once. He had noticed Masters, and had conjectured, rightly enough, that his was one of those low natures which can be bought. He went up to town, therefore, resolved to bribe Masters into doing his will, and to silence Jane Unwin. He took with him the only weapon he had—one he had picked up some months before in his uncle's house. But he did not believe that it would be necessary to use the revolver. He hoped to be able to cajole or frighten the girl into doing what he wanted. But Jane Unwin was not to be either cajoled or frightened. She defied Abbot. He threatened to shoot her. She, maddened with the loss of all her hopes, and driven to frenzy by her accomplice's taunts, struck at him. There was a scuffle, and all that Abbot knew the next moment was that he was standing with a smoking pistol in his hand and a deadly fear at his heart, while a woman lay stiff and dead at his feet.

The murderer spent his last sovereign in bribing Masters to keep the half stupefied victim a prisoner for a few weeks longer, and he was obliged to forge the name of one of the bank's customers at Darnport, in order to obtain the advance he had tried to get from Harold Kenyon without the formality of a guarantee. This was not found out until afterwards.

Two days before the day appointed for the wedding, the bride caught a bad cold; and on the twelfth she was confined to bed. This led to the marriage being postponed for a few days; and the delay, as it happened, saved Kate from a lifetime of misery.

Nothing was heard of the escaped criminal for some days. Then it was said that his body had been found on the beach at Darnport. This rumour turned out to be true. And as a short time afterwards a small boat was discovered floating about in the bay, bottom upwards, there seemed good ground for hoping that Abbot had not been guilty of suicide, but had been drowned while trying to make his way to some other part of the coast.

* * * * *

Shortly after Vere's return to Wythecombe, Mrs. Dale went abroad with her daughter.

They are coming home, however, in order to be present at Vere's marriage, which is to take place in April.

Harold has not yet asked Kate to be his wife. He is afraid of her, Winnie Denvers says, because she is an heiress. This may be true; but Winnie has told them both that if they are not engaged before she leaves her father's house as a bride, she will denounce them at the wedding-breakfast as a faithless pair. And there can hardly be a doubt that whether the Rector's daughter carries out her threat or not, she will not permit Harold Kenyon and her old friend Kate to live to the end of the year in single blessedness.

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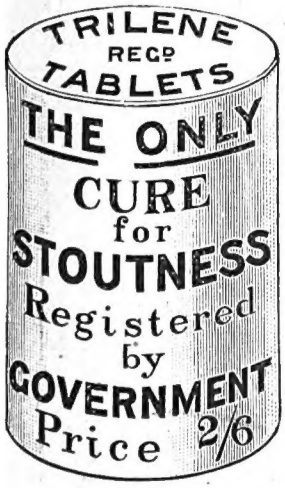

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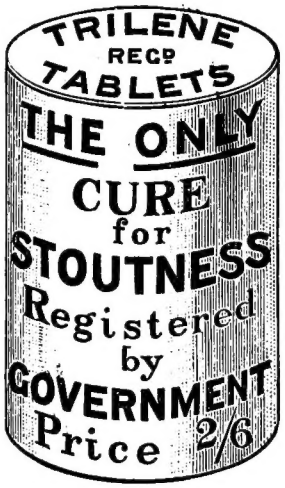

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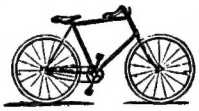

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